

Chapter 1: Training, Knight Bus and Leaky Cauldron.

There was a knock at the door. A dog started barking like mad as it scrabbled at the door with its nails.

A small house elf dressed in a small pink dress with a white apron made her way over to the door, gripped the black dog's collar tightly, and opened it slowly.

"Miss Hermione!" she greeted. The brown-haired, brown-eyed girl smiled brightly at the small elf.

"Hey Dee-Di," she greeted as she walked into the house carrying a large duffle bag that was flung over her shoulders.

Hermione Granger was dressed in her normal clothes. She was wearing a baby pink-strapped top and her dark blue denim jeans. Her curly hair was pulled up into a ponytail and she wore trainers on her feet.

Dee-Di shut the door behind Hermione before letting the dog go. With an excited bark, he leapt toward Hermione and jumped up so that he was standing on his hind legs with his paws on Hermione's chest, causing Hermione to laugh.

"Hey boy, did you miss me?" she asked as she ran her hands through the dog's sleek fur. Rex just stretched up further and gave her a lick on her cheek, causing Hermione to giggle as she pushed the dog down before wiping her cheek clean. "Lay off you big puppy," she teased.

Running footsteps sounded down the stairs and a familiar raven-haired female made her way into the hallway. She caught sight of Hermione and an excited smile lit up her face.

"Hey!" the female voice greeted brightly with excitement in her voice. Hermione spun around and her eyes lit up with excitement.

"Mia!" she greeted before both girls bounded over to each other and hugged. Mia Black pulled away at arm's length and looked her best friend over.

“Look at you, you’re growing!” she exclaimed and Hermione rolled her eyes. Over the summer, she found that she was growing quite steadily on top, but thankfully it seemed to have stopped for the time being. She was tired of having one bra that fit her one-week but was too small the next.

“Tell me about it,” Hermione groaned before she eyed her best friend. “Besides, you can’t talk.” Mia rolled her eyes. She had been growing too and was slightly bigger than Hermione but she had stopped – seemingly for good – much to her relief.

“Do you have any idea how lucky we are that boys don’t really notice us yet?” Mia asked and Hermione laughed before Mia smirked. “Or should I just say I’m lucky?” Hermione blushed before she slapped Mia’s arm.

“Will you stop that?” she asked and Mia rolled her eyes.

“Hey,” a male voice greeted, causing Hermione to freeze on the spot and Mia to look behind her with a sly smile. Hermione slowly turned around and smiled when she saw Harry while her brain went into overload.

Harry had been growing over the summer. He was a good foot taller than both girls, and though his hair was as messy as ever, it looked like he had tamed it somewhat into spikes instead. He wore a dark green t-shirt and black baggy jeans over his bare feet.

“Hi, Harry,” greeted Hermione before Harry moved forward and hugged her. She hugged him back before biting her bottom lip. She reflected, *“He’s gotten more muscles too,”* before he pulled away.

“Are you ready for more training?” he asked and she rolled her eyes.

“Can’t wait! What are we doing for the rest of the summer?” she asked, curious. Harry and Mia shared an amused look before turning back to her.

“Our elemental and animagus abilities,” Harry told her and smiled when he saw her eyes light up with excitement as she looked between the two of them.

“Are you sure?” she asked and Mia nodded.

“Yep, dad and Aunt Cissy says it’s time to learn them – they’ve been so happy with how you’ve been able to catch up with your fighting lessons that they decided to move us on,” Mia explained.

Hermione had come up at the beginning of the summer and trained extra hard – this time, Harry, Mia and Draco had been the ones training her. Sirius and Narcissa gave her even more lessons after those before they finally tested her in the middle of the summer to see how far she had progressed.

Much to their amazement, she had passed each of their tests and so they decided to move the kids up a level and get a start on their more specialized training of elemental and animagus abilities.

“When are we starting then?” Hermione asked.

“When Draco comes up. He can’t stay too long because his father has been a bit antsy due to the fact that I stopped Voldie from coming back in second year,” Harry told her and Hermione rolled her eyes while Mia laughed.

“And Harry doesn’t want Draco to kick his butt because he took Dobby away from him,” Mia jumped in.

“How is Dobby?” Hermione asked. Harry scratched the back of his head as he shot her a sheepish grin.

“He’s a little...overbearing,” Mia filled in, causing Hermione to look at her. “He keeps calling Harry ‘Master Harry Potter’. Harry has been trying to get him to shorten the title and just call him ‘Harry’, but Dobby is kinda stuck in a stubborn gear at the moment.”

“Oh,” Hermione stated in a sympathetic tone while her brown eyes were filled with laughter.

“Yeah,” Mia replied in the same tone as she fought to keep the smile from her face over Harry’s predicament. Harry wasn’t fooled, however.

“Oh go ahead, laugh – it’s obvious the pair of you want to,” Harry shot at them in a mock hurtful tone, causing both girls to stifle even more laughter.

There was another knock at the door before it swung open. They turned to see Draco making his way into the hallway with his mother walking in behind him. Draco grinned when he saw his cousins and friend as he removed his cloak.

“Hey, everyone is here already!” Draco greeted before he shot Harry a glare. “Harry,” he said in a slightly colder tone, causing both girls to cover their mouth to again muffle their laughter. Harry’s shoulders slumped down in defeat.

“Come on Draco, it’s nearly been a whole month – will you just get over it already?” Harry complained. “Your dad was beating him up!” Draco relaxed back into a smirk.

“I’m teasing,” Draco shot back, causing Harry to roll his eyes. “Besides, it’s kinda nice not having a nutter of a house elf anymore.”

“Yeah, now / get the nutter house elf,” Harry muttered under his breath.

Narcissa shook her head at the conversation in front of her as she took off her cloak and hung it up.

“Where’s your uncle?” Narcissa asked as she moved closer to the children, turning their attention to her.

“He’s in the elemental room at the moment, getting everything ready,” Mia told her and Narcissa nodded as she ushered the children over towards the room.

“Why are you pushing us?” Harry asked his aunt. Narcissa looked down at Harry.

“Sirius told me to take you into the room when I arrived, though he never told me what room he would be in,” she explained and got nods in return.

Narcissa opened the door and the children walked into the room, where they saw Sirius was pacing back and forth, writing something on his notepad. He usually carried one around during these sessions so that he could write down the progress of each teen on whatever activity they were doing at the time - so none of the group was surprised to see this.

Sirius looked up when he heard the door open and smiled when he saw them.

"Hey kids. Cissy," he greeted and waved them in. They moved in closer to the older man.

"Okay kids, get in your places," Narcissa told them all. Harry moved over to the spot where there were candles surrounding a pillow. Draco moved over towards the grassy area and sat down. Mia headed over to the open area on the far side while Hermione moved over to the pool and sat down on its edge.

"Take your time and concentrate on what your elements are; try and see it in your mind eye. The main thing you want to do is get into contact with the element you are trying to control," Sirius guided them. "It will be difficult do to the fact that this is your first time, so try and not get too impatient."

All four of them closed their eyes, took in a deep breath, and let their mind search out the element to which they were connected.

Hermione could feel the water stirring around her legs as she sat there as still as she could. Draco could feel the earth rumbling slightly under his hands. Mia could feel the air start to whirl around her.

Harry's eyes snapped open and the candles in front of him lit up straight away. His eyes glazed over as he concentrated on the flame as hard as he could. Sirius was looking over their progress, taking into account their levels of magic when he saw Harry's apparent lack of concentration.

Sirius moved over to Harry and, once closer, saw that he was struggling slightly with the flame in front of him.

“Concentrate!” Sirius snapped only to jump away from Harry, as the flames from the candles shot up higher, almost burning Sirius. “Harry!” he exclaimed.

Harry’s eyes flickered back to their normal intensity and then widened when he saw the flame going down from its unusual height till it finally went out.

“Cool!” Mia exclaimed as she hurried over to Harry and eyed the candle with interest before she turned back to Harry. “Looks like that means you’re more powerful than we realised.”

“What happened?” Draco asked, curious to what had forced the flame even higher. Harry shook his head.

“I don’t know, I was just frustrated with the lack of success and when Uncle Sirius growled at me, it was like everything snapped and forced it out,” Harry explained.

“Hmm...could be linked to your wandless powers,” Mia mentioned. “Remember how yours just broke free when you really got frustrated?” Harry nodded. “Maybe it has to be the same way for fire.”

“She could be onto something,” Draco told Harry.

“So that means all we have to do is the same thing we did to control our wandless magic?” Harry asked.

“No,” Sirius told them and they looked at him. “Wandless magic and elemental abilities are two completely different things. I think frustration comes into play with fire because it’s an unpredictable element – you never know how a fire is going to react. Harry was frustrated and it broke through, forcing the flame to be dangerous. I think it all depends on your emotions.

“You can do some wandless magic?” Hermione interjected excitedly and Draco nodded.

“Yeah, we’ve been doing it since we were kids but we can only do small stuff at the moment,” Draco explained.

“Oh, so when do you think I’ll be able to wandless magic?” Hermione asked.

“Have you ever found yourself doing something you didn’t mean to do?” Mia asked. Hermione thought about everything she had done over the years.

“Sometimes but I just thought they were accidental magic,” she admitted.

“Do you remember what each occasion was like? Were you under stress or were you relaxed?” Sirius asked only to get a shrug from Hermione.

“Sorry, I can’t really remember, I didn’t really think about it that much at the time,” Hermione explained with an apologetic look.

“Don’t worry about it, these things happen,” Sirius assured her. He looked around the room before looking at his watch. “Okay, time to give it a rest – I didn’t expect any of you to break through the barrier straight away. You made some progress so we’ll leave it there for the time being.”

“Go and get ready, dinner will be ready soon,” Narcissa told them and the kids nodded as they made their way up the stairs to their bedroom. Narcissa turned back to Sirius with a concerned look on her face. Sirius nodded.

“I know,” Sirius, told her, understanding her fears about what was happening. It looked like Harry was a lot more powerful than any of them had expected and they wondered what to expect in the next few years.

It was now Harry’s thirteenth birthday and he was enjoying the presents that he received from Hermione, Mia, Sirius, Narcissa, and Draco. Narcissa and Draco had left two days earlier because Lucius Malfoy had summoned them home, but everyone else was seated around the kitchen table.

Harry opened a Broomstick Servicing Kit from Hermione.

“Oh, wow!” Harry uttered and Hermione smiled.

“You love that broom too much so I decided to get you something to take care of it with,” she informed him and got a huge hug in reply.

Mia had gotten Harry a wand cleaning kit – she explained that wands needed to be cleaned regularly and it turned out that the reason why none of them had done it when they were younger was due to the house elves taking the wands and cleaning them for their master or mistress.

Draco had gotten Harry new Quidditch gloves because his were getting a bit worn out in addition to some new Xbox games for them to compete over whenever Draco was visiting.

Sirius and Narcissa had chipped in together and given Harry new dragon hide protective clothing that consisted of a dragon hide jacket - which looked like leather to everyone else - and dragon hide boots that he could wear on any occasion.

Soon there was a ringing sound from within the house causing Sirius to glance up from his paper to see what set off the alarms before turning back to his papers once more.

“Letters and more presents,” Sirius called out as the owls floated down into the kitchen where everyone was sitting at the table.

Errol, the Weasleys’ family owl, crashed into the side of the table, causing everyone to wince.

“Poor Errol, he must have flown for ages. He really looks beat,” Hermione told them as she picked up the owl. She untied the package that was wrapped around his legs before setting him up on the counter with a small dish of water.

Hermione sat back down next to Harry and saw that he had already opened his presents from Ron. “What did Ron get you?” Hermione asked as she leaned over Harry’s shoulder.

“A Sneakoscope,” Harry told her before he placed it one side and read the letter before smiling. “They went to Egypt to visit Bill with their money that they won in the draw.”

“Cool, how long did they say there were going away for?” Mia asked as she pushed some of the wrapping papers to the side.

“They went away for a month – they say they should be back the week before school starts and wonder if we could meet up with them then,” Harry informed her as he reached over toward another unopened parcel only to jerk his hand back when it growled.

“Huh?” Sirius asked, started as he pulled the newspaper away from his face and looked at the unopened parcel. “Who is that present from?” Sirius asked.

“Hagrid,” Harry replied, not once taking his eyes off the package.

“He wouldn’t have sent you anything dangerous, would he?” Hermione asked, though her voice gave away her uncertainty.

“No,” Mia told her, not sure herself. Hedwig hooted from where she was sitting on top of the cupboard while Rex just tilted his head curiously at the parcel.

The package then moved slightly causing the three kids to move back from it before Harry mustered up the courage to act. He wasn’t in Gryffindor for nothing.

Harry leaned in and hurriedly unwrapped the present. Everyone watched as the paper fell away to reveal a fur-covered book with what look liked teeth protecting the paper within its mouth.

“The Monster Book of Monsters,” Mia recited while Hermione grabbed the letter from Harry and skimmed it.

“Hagrid says you might find it useful for the new term,” Hermione told Harry, causing him to look at the young woman with an arched eyebrow.

“Useful?” Harry demanded as the book started to scuttle sideways like a crab before it reached the edge of the table near Harry. Harry watched it warily only to see eyes pop out of the book, reminding him of a spider.

All of a sudden, the book let out a snarl before it launched itself at Harry, snapping its mouth.

“Argh!” Harry yelled as he shoved the book away from him. It landed on the ground with a loud heavy thump before it started sliding all over the place, growling and snarling. Rex started barking as he bounced about with excitement and fear. Hedwig was just watching the scene with interest.

“Catch that book!” Mia shouted.

“Rex, calm down!” Hermione shouted as everyone rushed into the living room, chasing after the book.

Once they arrived in the living room, however, the book was nowhere to be seen.

“Where on earth did it go?” Sirius asked, puzzlement colouring his voice as he moved further into the room while looking around.

When Sirius passed the couch, the book shot out from under it, causing the kids to spring to action.

“There it is!” Harry shouted and all three of them launched themselves at the book only for it to scuttle away from their grasps. They groaned as they collided and hit the ground, hard.

Sirius grabbed the book before it could go anywhere further and bound it with a spell from his wand before he looked down at the kids on the floor.

“Oh,” Mia groaned out as she blew a strand of her black hair out of her face while Hermione just rolled onto her back and Harry placed his forehead on the cool wooden floor.

“Only Hagrid would send me a book that would attack me,” Harry muttered.

“We’re heading into Diagon Alley – maybe the book keeper would have an idea on how to handle it,” Sirius suggested and Mia shook her head.

“I don’t think so. Otherwise there would have been a note to tell us how to handle it,” Mia told him.

“Maybe it’s simple, I mean – with beasts, you stroke them – right?” Hermione asked and got nods in reply. “Maybe it’s the same with the book, maybe you have to stroke it somewhere for it to open up properly?”

“I’m not touching it,” Harry informed Hermione.

“I’ll do it,” Sirius told them as he started stroking the book, looking to see where its spot was till he brushed his hand over its spine. Sirius felt it shudder in his hands before it relaxed and fell open to the first page.

“He did it,” Hermione told Harry and Mia as she watched Sirius upside down from where she was lying on the ground.

“How?” Harry mumbled, not once lifting his head from the floor.

“He stroked the spine – we can spread the news around to the shop keeper if he don’t know so they can pass the message on to the students,” Hermione told him.

“Great,” Harry told her before he winced, lifting himself off the floor. “But I vote that we don’t have any more of those books running about.”

“Agreed,” Mia agreed as she rolled over on to her back and sat up, carefully.

Sirius just smiled at the kids as he watched Hermione gingerly stand up from where she was lying.

“We’re heading into Diagon Alley today and you kids are going to be staying over at the Leaky Cauldron – the Weasleys want to take you all to the train station,” Sirius told them.

“They what?” Harry moaned, causing everyone to look at him. “Sorry, it's just – Ginny said, back in second year, that her mother was worried about me despite the fact that she had never met me and...” he trailed off as Sirius caught on.

“Yeah, Molly can be overbearing when she wants to be. All I can say is try and stay out of her way if you can,” Sirius told him and Harry nodded.

“At least we can get our things,” Hermione told them and remembrance hit Harry.

“And your present!” he blurted out, causing Hermione to look at him, startled.

“Harry?” she asked, concerned.

“I told you that I would buy you a pet as a present for your birthday,” Harry reminded her and understanding dawned in Hermione’s dark eyes.

“Oh yes,” she remembered.

“Okay, you all go and get yourself ready. We want to try and get there tonight,” Sirius told them. They nodded as they headed up to their bedrooms to pack their trunks for Hogwarts.

A few hours and a couple of panic attacks later, they finally had their trunks packed and ready. Mia and Harry had let their owls out so they could fly to Diagon Alley to wait for them rather than carrying them along in the cages.

Harry and Hermione’s trunks were waiting at the bottom of the steps while Mia was dragging hers down the stairs.

“How are we getting to the Leaky Cauldron?” Mia asked.

“By the bus,” Sirius told them as he helped her drag her trunk down to the hallway. With all the trunks together he brought out his wand and tapped them twice before they shrunk down.

“Bus?” Harry asked, wondering why they were going to us a muggle form of transportation. Sirius smiled.

“Relax Harry, it’s still a wizarding transport – it’s better for some people who would rather not floo or don’t like brooms,” Sirius told them before he tapped the top of his head three times to change his usual disguised form of Mac Johnson.

Everyone picked up their now shrunk trunks, placed them into their pockets, and made their way out into the street. Mac closed the door behind him and locked it before he led the way down until they came to a stop at the edge of the pavement.

“What now?” Mia asked as she looked around, curiously.

Mac just smiled as he lifted up his wand and all of a sudden there was a loud bang and a purple triple-decker bus stood in front of them.

“Bloody hell,” Harry exclaimed, channelling Ron.

“Welcome to the Knight Bus, emergency transport for stranded witch or wizard,” the conductor in a purple uniform announced as he leapt out of the bus.

“Emergency transport?” Mia whispered to Hermione, who just shrugged back in return.

“Just stick out your wand hand, step on board and we can take you anywhere you want to go. My name is Stan Shunpike; I will be your conductor this evening,” Stan finished before he looked at his customers.

“Anywhere?” Hermione asked as one eyebrow rose slightly.

“Anywhere but under water – can’t go anywhere underwater,” Stan corrected while Mia turned her head to the side, muffling her laughter.

“Diagon Alley, Stan,” Mac told him as he handed a couple of gallons to cover the price.

“Right you are,” Stan told him as he stood to the side and let the man and 3 teenaged children on the bus.

Harry, Hermione, and Mia stopped in their tracks when they saw that there were no seats, only beds.

“Beds?” Hermione asked. Mac smiled.

“It takes a while to get from one place to another and sometimes people would like to have a nap during the ride – some actually think it makes the ride easier,” Mac explained.

“Easier?” Harry asked, latching on to such an unusual word to describe a bus ride. Mac just chuckled as he settled himself on a bed while the kids took another

“That’s Ernie Prang, the driver,” Stan introduced to the sleeping driving in the front of the bus.

“Is he supposed to be sleeping?” Mia asked.

“He likes to take a quick nap at each stop,” Stan informed her before he turned around to face the driver. “Take her away Ern,” Stan told the driver with a tap of his knuckles on the window. Ernie sat up and took a bite of his sandwich before he pulled the clutch and pressed his foot hard on the pedal, causing the bus to shoot off.

“Argh!” the kids screamed as they were flung backward on the bed. Mia flung a hand out and grabbed the pole to hold herself up. Harry grabbed Hermione instead and pulled her close to his body to brace themselves against the frantic motions caused from the bus weaving its way through traffic at an incredible speed.

After what seemed like forever they finally came to a stop outside a familiar building. Hermione couldn’t help but let out a sigh of relief as they all got off the bed and made their way over to the doors at the front of the bus.

“The Leaky Cauldron,” Stan told them all as the kids shakily got off the bus with Mac following close behind.

Hermione was clinging onto Harry while she rested her head against his chest, trying to overcome the traumatic ride.

“Maybe I shouldn’t have exposed you kids to the bus,” Mac told them, amused. Mia was resting her back against the wall, bent down at the waist while her palms were planted against her thighs.

“Laugh it up,” she informed her father. “That has to be the worst form of transportation in the wizarding world.”

“Ha, you should have seen James after the first time he was on it! The boy was so high up on adrenaline that his mother was thought he was on drugs,” Mac told them and Harry looked at his uncle.

“He liked it?” Harry asked, aghast, and Mac nodded.

“Oh yeah, he loved it – Moony on the other hand didn’t accept it too well. I think it was mostly due to his furry little problem,” Mac explained. They all nodded their understanding.

Moony was a nickname for James and Sirius’s best friend – Remus Lupin. He was a werewolf due to being bitten by another werewolf when he was a small kid. Ironically, it was the same werewolf that had been hanging around Draco’s house lately.

“Why not owl him?” Hermione asked as she slowly regained her self-control.

“Why would he believe me?” Mac asked and Harry sighed.

“Because he was your best friend and I bet if you two were to meet up and clear the air between you, he’d understand,” Harry explained.

“They’re the smartest students in the school, you are best off listening to them,” Mia pointed out as she straightened her spine and shifted her whole back against the wall. Her colour was slowly returning. “Besides, Harry, Draco, and I wanna know about our Uncle Moony – it’s not fair that we only get one side of what our parents were like.”

Mac couldn't help but laugh at that. "Maybe one day kids," he told them before he straightened. "And we better get you in there before Molly comes out with a frying pan and hits me."

They all straightened up. Mia pulled out her wands and preformed complex charms on her father to make sure that the image was sticking firmly in place and that no counter charms could reveal his identity.

Once she was satisfied, they all made their way into the Leaky Cauldron and Mac led the way over to the check-in area.

"Mr Johnson and guests, I believe you have three rooms for us?" Mac asked, using his alias. Tom, the bartender, looked up at the guest before flipping through the book and stopping at a particular page. He smiled when he saw the guest's name written in the book.

"Yes Mr Johnson, here are your keys," Tom told him as he handed over four keys.

"Thank you," Mac told him and Tom nodded.

"Dinner will be served at 6 pm. If you wish to have it earlier or later, please let me know," Tom told him. Mac smiled at him before he walked back over to the kids.

"Okay kids, let's get ourselves settled in. We all have a very busy day tomorrow," Mac told them as he led them upstairs to their rooms. He handed each of them their own key and let them headed to his own room. The reason that they all wanted their own rooms was because the girls' sleeping habits were different – Hermione had a habit of staying up late reading and then getting up at the crack of the dawn. Mia liked listening to her music while she read and she hated getting up in the morning. They had tried sharing a room early in the summer but gave up after one night, each claiming that the other was a nightmare to share with. Harry preferred having a room to himself because it gave him peace from their chaotic schedule.

Harry took his key and opened his door; he found that his was next to Hermione's room while Mia and Sirius were sleeping across the hall.

“Night,” Harry told them all.

“Night,” they replied and they all stepped into the rooms. Harry closed the door behind him and smiled when he saw that Hedwig was sitting on the edge of a small desk in the corner.

“Hey girl,” Harry greeted as he reached over and stroked her white feathers. He pulled out a small owl treat and offered it to Hedwig. She hooted and nipped Harry’s fingers softly before taking the treat into her beak and feasting on it hungrily.

Harry turned back to the bed and got himself ready to sleep. He had a feeling that it was going to be an interesting week.

TBC

Chapter 2: Diagon Alley, Pets and Run!

Harry, Hermione and Mia made their way through Diagon Alley to collect the rest of their things for Hogwarts before they finally came to a stop outside the bookshop.

“Okay, I’ll get the rest of the books,” Mia told them as she held out her hands for their lists. “Harry, you get the equipment and Hermione, you get the potions stuff.”

“Sure - that way we’ll get everything done quickly and we can just spend the rest of the day lazing about,” Harry agreed as he waved his wand, duplicating the lists so that everyone had one of each.

“Merlin Hermione, just how many lessons are you taking?” Mia demanded she took a look at Hermione’s long list of books.

“A few, the others are just a precaution. Professor McGonagall didn’t want me to be left short-handed just in case I need a certain book,” Hermione explained.

“Okay. How about we meet up outside Florean Fortescue’s Ice Cream?” Mia suggested. Harry and Hermione agreed.

“That’ll be fine, it’ll probably be the first place Ron will look for us,” Harry explained, causing both girls to giggle and Harry to roll his eyes. “Come on!” he tugged on Hermione’s elbow as they both walked off while Mia made her way towards the book shop.

Once she arrived, Mia looked around the shop and smiled when she saw the bookkeeper before walking purposely over to him.

“Hi,” she greeted and the man looked at her. “I just wanted to pass on some information about those monster books,” the man looked at her, interested. “You stroke the spine to get them to relax and open.” Relief came over the man’s face.

“Oh, thank you. Everyone was confused about how to open the books and they didn’t want to buy them until they had some idea. This will really help us,” the man told her and Mia waved it off.

“No problem. Now if you can just help me figure out where all these books are, we can call it even,” Mia told him as she handed their lists over to the man who took it with a small chuckle.

“No problem,” he told her as he led her around the shop to find the books.

Meanwhile, Harry and Hermione were making their way through the town. They had collected everything off their lists and were lazily walking about.

“How about we get your pet today?” Harry asked Hermione, who looked up at him.

“Really?” asked Hermione. Harry nodded.

“Yeah, this way you don’t have to worry about it later in the week. Besides, shouldn’t you get it early so you both can get used to each other before you head to Hogwarts?” Harry asked. Hermione smiled.

“Thank you,” Hermione told him and Harry waved it off as they came to a stop outside the pet shop.

“Here we are. Why don’t you have a look around and see what you would like while I get some owl treats for Hedwig?” Harry suggested. Hermione just shot him a delighted smile before she hurried into the shop while Harry shook his head in amusement before following her in.

The bell above the door rang, signalling their entrance. Harry looked around and saw types of animals around. Over on one side of the shop were rows of owls. Closer to the back there were jars of toads, fire snails – they left a trail of fire instead of slime – and different coloured rats and mice. Harry noticed that there was a cage of black rats at the counter and they were all showing off.

Cats were all over the place. One that caught his eye was a large orange cat sitting up high on a shelf. He couldn’t quite decide if it was a very large cat or a very small tiger. Harry shook his head as he moved in closer and stood next to the counter.

"Yes dear, can I help you?" a voice asked and he turned to see a female, maybe 19, working behind the counter.

"Yeah - could I have some treats for my owl please?" Harry asked.

"Of course," she replied, flashing him a bright grin as she flipped her black hair back and batted her brown eyes at him. "Do you have any *special types* you might like?"

"Mice thanks," Harry told her. She nodded as she headed off into the backroom while Harry turned around and rested the small of his back against the counter. He watched Hermione flit from one side of the room to the other, looking at all the creatures that the shop had to offer.

"Here you are," the female greeted once more. Harry turned around and smiled his thanks as he handed his money over to the woman. He was still placing the treats inside the other bag he was carrying when Hermione walked over to them.

"Have you decided?" Harry asked as he straightened up. Hermione shook her head.

"No, I can't figure out what I want," Hermione fretted as her brown eyes darted swiftly from one creature to another. Harry placed a hand on her shoulder, calming her down.

"Relax. You have the whole day and tomorrow to make up your mind," Harry reminded her. Hermione nodded before she looked at Harry once more.

"Did you get your owl treats?" she asked. Harry nodded.

"Yeah, do you want me to wait here or do you want me to go on ahead to the ice cream parlour?" Harry asked.

"Go ahead, I might be here for a while if I can't decide," Hermione explained and Harry nodded.

"Okay, do you want me to get you ice cream?" Harry asked.

"Sure, get me vanilla with the strawberry chocolate topping," Hermione told him and Harry nodded as he pulled out some money and placed it in Hermione's hand.

"This is in case you decide," he told her as she started to protest. "Hey, your birthday present from me, remember." Hermione gave in and nodded. "Good, meet you over there later." He kissed her cheek before picking up the bags and leaving the shop.

"Hm, interesting," the girl stated and Hermione turned to face her.

"What?" Hermione asked and the girl looked at her.

"That he seemed to be interested in you when there are plenty more desirable girls about," she informed Hermione before walking off. Hermione just stared after her with hurt eyes before she suddenly remembered Harry's words from second year. Relaxing with that thought, she turned back to her pet hunting. She refused to let anyone get her down this year.

Harry found himself sitting outside Florean Fortescue's Ice Cream Parlour eating his sundae when he heard his name being called out.

"Harry!" a male voice shouted and Harry turned to see Ron heading over his way. Harry grinned as he stood up.

"Hey, you look great! How was Egypt?" Harry asked, taking in Ron's freckly look. Ron just grinned back as he sat down next to Harry. Harry saw Ginny taking her seat across from them next to the ice cream. "Nice to see you too Ginny," Harry greeted as he reached over and took Hermione's dish and sat it down next to his.

"Hungry?" Ginny asked, teasingly. Harry couldn't help but smile.

"Nah, the other one is for Hermione – she's getting her pet so I was waiting for her," Harry told her and Ginny nodded. As Harry turned back to face Ron, he missed the dark look that shot over her face.

"It was fantastic, mate," Ron told him, getting back to Harry's question about Egypt. "We even got to see Norbert again. He's really massive

now! It's a good thing Hagrid didn't keep him back then." Harry laughed.

"I'm sure Hermione will be delighted to hear about that," Harry told him. Ron brightened up as he remembered something.

"Oh, and I got a new wand – mom took me to Ollivanders' today," Ron told him as he brought out his new wand and showed it off. Harry smiled at his friend, enjoying his happiness. "How is Sirius dealing being stuck at home?" Ron asked; keeping up the pretence that Sirius wasn't with the teenagers.

Ginny perked up, she had been keeping her ear low to the ground for any information she could use to get her closer to Harry.

"He's fine. I think he is having too much fun taunting the ministry," Harry told Ron with an amused smile and Ron chuckled.

"I bet he is," Ron quipped back. Harry just rolled his eyes in agreement.

"So Sirius isn't here?" Ginny asked causing Harry and Ron to look at her.

"Erm, didn't we just say that he wasn't here?" Harry asked Ron, confused about where Ginny had gone during the conversation. But Ron just narrowed his eyes at his sister. Ginny had been trying to get information out of him and the twins all summer.

"Ginny, we just said that Sirius wasn't here – I don't know what is going on with you but maybe you should just drop whatever it is you are doing," Ron warned her before he turned back to Harry. His eyes widened when he looked over Harry's shoulder.

"What on earth does she have?" Ginny demanded as she also looked over Harry's shoulder. Harry turned around and arched an eyebrow when he saw that Hermione was carrying a furry cat in her arms. Its face was squashed like it had run into a wall and its fur was quite unkempt as well. Harry couldn't help but smile though at the glowing look on Hermione's face as she cuddled the pet closer to her.

Ginny watched the scene with an annoyed expression. She was just starting to make progress in getting Harry's attention when Hermione showed up and Harry had forgotten all about her once more.

"What the hell is that?" Ron demanded only to feel a sharp slap on the back of his head. "Ow!" he rubbed the back of his head as he spun around to glare at Mia, who was standing behind him. She had just arrived after getting everyone's books and had overheard Ron's question.

"It's a cat," she informed him, matter of factly, before narrowing her eyes. "And I trust that you will be nice to it." Ron spun around to face the cat and Hermione once more.

"It looks like a wicked cat!" Ron finished off with a cheerful grin while Harry rolled his eyes and Hermione just gave him a smile. Mia just crossed her arms over her chest as Hermione moved closer to Harry.

"What's his name?" Harry asked.

"Crookshanks," Hermione told him and Harry reached out and scratched Crookshanks' head, causing him to purr.

"He's kinda cool," Harry admitted and Hermione smiled brightly up at him. Harry just smiled back while Ron and Mia exchanged looks of mirth.

"Come on, we better get back to the Leaky Cauldron," Mia told them. They all started to pack up their stuff.

"Oh," Hermione started as she turned to face Mia. "Did you tell the bookshop keeper...?"

"Yes," Mia jumped in. "I told him and he promised to let everyone else know."

"Know what?" Ginny asked while Ron threw Harry an amused smile.

"Are you telling me you're the one who figured out how to open those monster books?" Ron asked and Harry chuckled.

“Uncle Sirius actually, the book just attacked me and scuttled off before we could catch it. Hagrid had sent it to me for my birthday,” Harry explained and Ron snickered.

“The book attacked you?” Ron asked as Hermione placed Crookshanks into the carry basket that she bought before latching it closed and turning to face Ron with her hands on her hips.

“And why is that funny?” demanded Hermione. “That book could have done serious damage!”

“Okay, okay!” Ron exclaimed as he threw his hands up in surrender. “It’s just that we’ve never had a book that attacks people before!” Hermione just shot him a hard glare before she turned back to Crookshanks. “Jeez, I thought Harry loosened her up,” Ron whispered to Mia, who just covered her face with her hands so that no one could see that she was laughing.

Harry picked up the ice cream that he had gotten Hermione and handed it to her. Hermione took it with a bright smile.

“Thank you!” she told him before she tucked into the sweet. It was a tall vanilla ice cream with melted chocolate decorating the ice cream with chopped strawberries to add colour.

After Hermione finished eating, Harry picked up Crookshanks' casket while Ron and Hermione each grabbed some of the bags that were surrounding the table before they all made their way back to the Leaky Cauldron.

They entered the building with Ron laughing at something Mia had told him. Harry and Hermione were holding onto each other and were laughing too while Ginny just gave them all a fake smile, pretending she was enjoying her time with them while she was actually frustrated over how her plan to “get Harry” wasn’t going the way she expected it to.

“Hello kids,” Arthur Weasley greeted. He watched as they all made their way into the dinner area. The kids smiled back.

“Hi,” they all greeted back.

"Ginny and Ron, where have you been?" Molly demanded.

"Sorry, we got caught up with Harry, Hermione and Mia," Ron apologised and Molly's eyes widened when she saw Harry.

"Of course, Harry, how are you dear?" Molly asked as she moved closer to the young man and started fussing over him. "Are you eating properly?"

"Yes, I'm fine," Harry, told her, trying very hard not to get irritated with the elderly woman.

"Hey kids, you made it back in one piece," Mac announced his presence with a smile.

"Ha, ha, very funny," Mia shot at him with a sarcastic smile before she placed her bags on the table. Hermione and Ron did the same thing before Harry placed Crookshanks' carrier down on the table and unlatched it so the cat could make its way out.

"Here you go, buddy," Harry told the cat as he climbed out of the casket.

Hermione made her way over to them and ran her hand down Crookshanks' back.

"So, this is your present from Harry?" Mac asked as he moved closer to the table and Hermione shot him a brilliant smile.

"Yeah, Harry handed me a bunch of money and told me to pick whatever I wanted," Hermione explained.

"You just gave her money?" Molly asked in a sceptical tone, causing Harry to look at her.

"Yes, is there a problem with that?" Harry asked. His tone had a hard edge to it.

"Dear, shouldn't you at least try and conserve your money for the future?" Molly asked in her motherly tone and Harry sighed.

“Trust me when I say this didn’t make a dent in my account,” Harry informed her before he turned to Mac. “What time are we leaving for Hogwarts?”

“Ten in the morning. Because we’re near the train station, there shouldn’t be a lot of trouble,” Mac explained to them.

“Great! We’ll go and put our stuff upstairs and pack so that we’re not running around all morning to do it,” Hermione informed them before shooting Ron a pointed look. “You too Ron, I know what you’re like.” Ron just shot her a teasing glare before they all grabbed their bags.

Hermione gathered Crookshanks into her arms and they all made their way upstairs to their rooms.

Ron arched an eyebrow when he saw that all three of them were in separate rooms.

“Why do you each have a separate room?” Ron asked. Mia shot him a grin.

“No, it’s not because Harry and Hermione are sneaking into each other rooms in the middle of the night,” she teased him, causing Harry and Hermione to throw each other startled looks before they looked back to Ron and Mia and saw them snickering.

“Oh, very funny,” Harry shot at them with a disgruntled look. Hermione just rolled her eyes while Ginny’s features had tightened at the thought of Harry and Hermione sneaking into each other’s rooms.

“Nah, we’re not sharing rooms because Hermione and I have different schedules – she likes to get up at the crack of the dawn while I’m sleeping, and I like to listen to music – loudly,” Mia explained to Ron.

“And I prefer to have my own room because it gives me a break from all the chaos we go through the day,” Harry added in.

“Cool,” Ron told them as they all made their way into Harry’s room so they could sort out their stuff.

It wasn't long after everyone had packed that they went downstairs for dinner. The twins were sitting across from Mia and Mac, making Mia laugh by relating what they had done over the summer. Ron and Ginny were sitting across from Harry and Hermione with Molly, Percy and Arthur taking up the end of the table.

"You didn't?" Mia asked through her laughter.

"We did," the twins replied together. "We tried to lock Percy in the Pyramid but our mum spotted us." Mac let out a howl of laughter.

"You two are classic," Mac praised them.

"Thank you," both twins told him as Mac regained his control and took a sip of water. "Remember the time we stole all the toilet seats?" Fred asked George, causing Mac to go into a coughing fit as he tried to drink and laugh at the same time. Mia rolled her eyes in amusement as she gently pounded Mac's back to help him through his coughing fit.

Harry and Hermione couldn't help but laugh at the sight before they turned back to face Ron.

"So, what do you think will happen this year?" Ron asked. Harry just smiled.

"I'm not counting anything out this time. I've already met a couple of things I never thought I would see in my life during the last two years so anything goes," Harry told him.

"Let just hope that we won't have some dangerous animals running about loose," Hermione told him. "I don't fancy having anyone attacked this year." Harry just rubbed her shoulders.

"Don't worry, I'm pretty sure you'll be safe this year but I'll protect you anyway," Harry teased her and she scoffed at him, amused. She knew that Harry was just teasing about protecting her. It was turning into a trademark between the two of them; even though Hermione could protect herself without any problem, Harry liked the thought of being able to protect her. Ginny, meanwhile, rolled her eyes in

disgust before she looked away. Molly narrowed her eyes at the couple before suppressing a shudder.

"Yeah, *you* do that Harry," Ron teased back causing Harry to kick his shin and Ron to jump in his chair, slamming his knees against the table. "Oi!" Ron gritted out.

"Now, now boys... play nice," Mia warned them as the dishes started clearing themselves away. Molly stood up, wanting to put an end to the display that she was watching.

"Okay kids, bedtime," Molly called out.

"Oh what?" Mia exclaimed as she looked at her watch. "It's only nine." Molly shot her a cold glare.

"You have to get up early tomorrow," Molly informed her and Mia snorted.

"For what?" Mia asked. "We're not your children therefore you have no right to tell us when we get up or not."

"You listen to me young madam..." Molly started but Harry stood up, cutting off any more arguments.

"Let's go upstairs," Harry told her and Mia pouted.

"There's no TV and the music in the wizarding world sucks," Mia informed him before shaking her head as she stood up. "God, I miss home – at least there we have some form of entertainment to keep us busy." She made her way up the stairs with Harry and Hermione following her.

"Oh, that girl will meet her downfall, you count on that," Molly informed her husband.

"Excuse me?" Mac asked as he stood up. Molly turned to face him.

"Oh, don't think I'm blaming you. That girl is a bad apple, but what do you expect when you have parents like hers," Molly told him.

"Molly," Arthur let out a groan as Mac's eyes hardened.

"Mia is *not* a bad apple. She just doesn't like purebloods very much because she thinks they are waste of space – with a few exceptions," Mac informed her before he eyed Molly in disgust. "And I'm not surprised." Molly let out a gasp of insult. "And you are not Mia's mother – she doesn't appreciate anyone trying to control her." With that, he walked up the stairs after the children.

"Good going mum," Ron told her before he got up and walked off. The twins also followed him while Percy and Ginny stayed where they were sitting.

Arthur let out a sigh of suffering before he stood up and looked at his wife.

"Molly, you have to learn that Harry is not your child. He will never be your child and if you keep acting like this, you will drive him out of the wizarding world," Arthur told her before he shook his head, sadly, and walked up the stairs.

"I think you're right mum," Ginny spoke up and Molly looked at her daughter. "Harry needs to get away from Sirius, Mia and Hermione – they are having an awful effect on him. He doesn't know the true way the wizarding world works. I just fear that one day Harry will learn that lesson too late and will suffer for it." Molly smiled down at her young daughter.

"And that is why you are a prefect match for him my dear. You can teach him the ways of our world and help bring our true saviour back," Molly told her daughter and watched as she flushed with pleasure at the elder woman's words.

Percy just frowned, as he looked back and forth his mother and sister. He had been watching the family with a close eye since Harry had arrived at Hogwarts, alive and well. Molly had been frantic that they didn't look hard enough for him and had demanded to Dumbledore that she wanted Harry away from Sirius Black to be brought up with them.

Ever since Ginny had started at Hogwarts, he had also kept an eye on her and saw that she would gaze at Harry with a sad look. That and she always acted like she was writing a letter to someone, but would hide the letter whenever someone went near it.

Percy couldn't help the gut feeling that was now filling the pit of his stomach. He thought that things were going to get worse as time went along and could only hope that everyone, especially Harry and Hermione – who he saw were growing closer each year – would be able to survive it.

Mac woke up the next morning after having a bad night of sleep. His anger was responsible for keeping him awake during the night. He couldn't believe that that Weasley woman had the nerve to badmouth his daughter in front of him and her friends.

He knew that Mia wasn't everyone's perfect daughter but she was to him. Mia reminded him so much of Callie. She was protective of her family and she was used to having her own schedule. Being forced to do something by someone was not the way to get into her good graces - and it always backfired on them in a bad way.

Something he knew all too well about.

Mac got out of bed and pulled on his jeans before he moved over to the door. He reached to open the handle only to groan when he felt a pain near his neck.

Mac rubbed the back of his neck as he made his way out of his bedroom only to bite back a grunt when he felt his neck crick. He was about to step on down the hallway when he saw Molly making her way over to her children's door before she caught sight of him and her eyes widened in shock and fear.

Mac couldn't help but feel confused at Molly's expression. The charm couldn't have worn off already, could it? He got his answer right away.

"Oh my god!" Molly shouted. "Sirius Black!"

Everyone spun around and they saw Sirius standing in the doorway. Sirius cursed before he slammed the door closed it with a locking

charm. He rushed over to the wardrobe, grabbed his wand and his bag, and threw himself out of the window just as the door burst open.

“He escaped out through the window!” one of the men shouted.

“Dad!” Mia screamed out as she rushed over to the room only for Molly to hold her back.

“Dear, he is a murderer!” Molly exclaimed as Mia fought her grip.

“Dad!” Mia screamed once more.

“Get your hands off her!” a male voice shouted, causing everyone to turn around and see Harry standing there, his green eyes flaring brightly.

Molly let Mia go and took a step back as Harry hurried forward and took Mia into his arms, hugging her. “He’ll be fine,” Harry whispered as he rocked Mia, who collapsed into Harry’s chest as understanding finally dawned on her.

Her father had been found and was now on the run for his life.

TBC

Chapter 3: Fudge, Dementors and Hogwarts.

Harry was sitting on a couch with Mia curled into his side, staring off into space. Hermione sat on the other side of Mia and was stroking back her hair as she and Harry exchanged worried looks.

They didn't know how to deal with this quiet, motionless Mia. It was like she had totally shut herself off and it scared Harry and Hermione to death.

"You need to get a hold of Aunt Cissy and Draco and let them know what is going on," Hermione whispered as she leaned into Harry. Harry nodded.

"I know. But what am I supposed to do with Mia? We need her with us," Harry whispered back and Hermione bit her bottom lip. She didn't have an answer and she was terrified. She was so used to seeing Mia as the tough girl who was ready to take on anything, and it broke her heart to see her best friend desolated over the fact that her father had been found out and was now in terrible danger.

The bushy-haired girl couldn't help but throw a glare at the red-haired mother as she stepped into the room. She knew it wasn't logical but she didn't give a damn. It was thanks to Molly Weasley - and her big mouth – that Sirius was now on the run for his life and her best friends were left alone just before they were to head back to Hogwarts.

Everyone had spent the day looking for Sirius while some people stayed behind and contacted the ministry. Molly had tried to mother everyone but it was rebuffed by Harry and Hermione and unnoticed by Mia.

It was nearly night time and they were waiting for the Ministry to come over and try and get answers out of them. Hermione wasn't in the mood for it. She was too worried about Mia and Sirius to want to deal with a couple of Ministry idiots.

The door opened and Arthur walked into the room where everyone was sitting. He saw that Harry, Hermione and Mia occupied the large couch with the still-comatose Mia in the middle. Ron was sitting on

the chair next to the couch not really doing much of anything, and Molly was pacing near the fireplace. The twins were sitting at the table with a serious look on their faces, while Percy quietly watched the members of his family with his eyes darting between them and a pensive expression on his face. Ginny was sitting on the chair across from Harry as she tried to gain his attention.

“Harry, Hermione, Mia, this is Cornelius Fudge,” Arthur told the kids as he walked in with the same man that Harry and Mia had met back in their second year while hidden under the invisibility cloak.

“It’s nice to finally meet you, Mr Potter. Miss Granger, I have heard a lot of good things about you from your teachers,” Fudge told them as he removed his purple hat.

“Get on with it,” Harry informed him, causing an insulted gasp from Molly Weasley. But he didn’t care. His uncle was out there, god knows where, running for his life because of one meddlesome woman couldn’t keep her mouth shut.

“Very well,” Fudge told them. “Where is Sirius Black?”

“And why should we tell you?” Harry asked, bitterly. “So you can go and collect him before making us watch him be killed?”

“Harry,” Hermione reached out and placed her hand on Harry’s shoulder, calming him. The young witch knew that Harry was terrified for his uncle but that he couldn’t take his temper out on the ministry right now.

“He is a murderer,” Fudge told them and Hermione sighed when she felt the muscles tighten under her hand before she turned to Fudge.

“No he isn’t,” Hermione informed Fudge, causing the elderly man to look at her. “If he was really a murderer, then why did he take Harry away from the Dursleys that Dumbledore left him with - the same people who the Potters stated very clearly in their will that Harry was never to go to if anything were to happen to them?” Hermione asked.

Hermione had been curious as to why Sirius had taken Harry from the Dursleys – she remembered that Mia had told her that if Sirius

hadn't taken Harry from the Dursleys, he wouldn't be the same person as he was now.

"What you need to understand is Petunia, Lily's sister, was incredibly jealous of her sister," Sirius told her. They were both in the kitchen, sitting at the table. Both of them had a mug of hot butterbeer. "When Petunia married Vernon, things got worse. Vernon couldn't cope with the idea of magic so he started calling them freaks."

"But, surely they would have taken care of a baby," Hermione protested. Sirius shook his head. He knew that Hermione had a huge heart and wanted to see the good in everyone. It hurt him to damage that innocent outlook.

"When I went to get Harry, he was sitting in the high chair still wearing the same clothes and nappy he had when Hagrid took him up. He had a tin of cold beans in front of him while Petunia was feeding her whale of a son. She told her husband that Harry had to learn to feed himself sooner or later because she wasn't going to do it for him," Sirius explained and Hermione felt her jaw drop and her eyes widen before she covered her mouth.

"That's horrible!" she exclaimed. "How could they do that to a baby!?" Sirius just shrugged.

"Lily knew that Vernon wouldn't be too welcoming to the idea of having a magical child in the house, so she made it pretty clear in their will that Harry was never to go to them. But Dumbledore violated that will and in the process their trust."

Hermione just shook her head, unable to comprehend that any parents would refuse to take care of a baby in need. She knew that she was happy, however, that Sirius had taken Harry back when he had the chance.

"And why would he want to kill his best friend? His wife?" Hermione finished off, shaking herself out of her thoughts.

"You're asking questions that only that madman can answer!" Molly exclaimed.

“Uncle Sirius is not a madman!” Harry shot at her, causing Molly to look at him.

“They’re right mom,” Ron jumped in as he moved over to stand behind the couch, supporting his friends. “Sirius has had all that chance to kill Harry but he never did. He brought Harry up, cared for him as his own and you want to arrest him on no evidence.”

“He is a death eater!” Fudge exclaimed.

“No, Lucius Malfoy is a death eater yet he’s walking around free like he owns the damn place,” Harry shot at Fudge, rendering him speechless. “You just want to arrest someone so you can be seen doing something that you failed to do properly 12 years ago.” Harry took a deep breath. “And we’re not going to help you. The public deserves to know the truth that the Ministry are a complete bunch of idiots – you didn’t even look for me that long before announcing that was I dead because you couldn’t handle the responsibility.”

“Harry,” Ginny started but Harry stood up, picking Mia up with him. Ron hurried around the side of the couch and took Mia from Harry for a minute when he looked to stretch his arms out.

“We’re going to bed, we’ll see you in the morning,” Harry informed them as he took Mia back into his arms and carried her up the stairs with Hermione and Ron following.

“They’re right,” Fred and George stated together. “Sirius Black hasn’t done anything to harm them at all... besides, all death eaters hate muggleborns – why would Sirius let Hermione spend the summer with them or have you forgotten she is a muggleborn?” Fred asked before he and his twin went up the stairs, following the others.

“I must ask you not to pressure Harry anymore,” Arthur told Fudge. “He is the boy who lived and is the one who got rid of Voldemort – how he did it is the question none of us have an answer to, and I’d rather not try to figure it out myself or push Harry away from the wizarding world because people keep pressuring him.”

“We need answers,” Fudge told him and Arthur sighed.

“I’m sorry but I have to agree with my children. There are far too many inconsistencies with the charges against Sirius Black and I will not be part of a group that wishes to try and jail innocent people,” Arthur told them before he turned around and headed up the stairs as well, leaving Molly, Ginny, Percy, and Fudge and his escort alone in the sitting room to ponder over what had happened.

Harry placed Mia onto the bed. Her eyes were closed and her breathing was deep and steady telling him that she had finally gone to sleep. Harry couldn’t help but close his eyes in welcome relief. He had been worried that Mia wouldn’t get any sleep because of everything that had happened today. He turned to look at Ron as he entered the room.

Ron nodded in unspoken understanding. “Don’t worry mate. I’ll kip in here – the couch is a pullout so I can sleep on it,” Ron told him and Harry shot him a smile of thanks. He didn’t want Mia alone in case she got a nightmare or woke up and couldn’t get back to sleep. He didn’t trust anyone from downstairs not to sneak into her room and try and access her mind to get answers.

“Hermione and I will be in my room – I have a feeling that she’ll take longer to get to sleep and I don’t want her to wake up Mia,” Harry whispered to Ron, who just nodded while carefully pulling out the couch so that it didn’t make any noise.

Harry made his way into his bedroom and saw that Hermione was still wide-awake. Harry made his way over to the bed and sat down on it, watching as she worked herself up.

“What do you think happened to the charms?” Hermione asked as she paced furiously across Harry’s room.

“I don’t know. I guess the charms wore off or Uncle Sirius forgot to renew them – he was used to living at home,” Harry suggested. Hermione sighed as she came to a stop next to the window and ran her hand through her dark bushy locks.

“What’s going to happen to us?” Hermione asked as she looked up at the starry night sky. Harry stood up and he moved over next to her and wrapped his arms around her waist, holding her close to him.

“Nothing. I won’t let anything happen to us,” Harry promised. Hermione just sighed as she rested the back of her head against his chest and they both stared quietly out the window, hoping that everything would be okay.

Harry blinked when he felt sunlight hitting his eyelids. He slowly opened his eyes and felt a warm body curled up next to him. He looked down and saw that Hermione snuggled into his side, sleeping.

Harry smiled softly as he reached out and brushed back her hair to kiss her forehead before gently climbing out of bed. He stretched languidly before he moved over to the window and saw a lot of people bustling about on the street.

His green eyes narrowed when he saw familiar looking cloaks and he sighed to himself. Aurors were now in the street looking for Sirius. Harry shook his head before he turned around. He grabbed his jeans from where he had slid them off last night and pulled them on before leaving the room.

He walked over to Mia’s bedroom and knocked on it twice before eventually entering. He felt his heart clench before he saw that Mia was sitting up on the bed, staring out her window.

“He’ll be fine you know. He is Sirius Black,” Harry told her as he moved closer to the bed. Mia turned to face him as Harry sat down next to her and she gave him a soft smile.

“I know,” she told him. “I’m more worried about how we’re going to clear him. I don’t want to lose my dad, Harry.” Harry shifted up closer and wrapped an arm around her shoulders, drawing her into his body.

“You’re not gonna lose him. None of us are. He’s tough and we will find some way to get his name cleared,” Harry promised her. Mia shot him a teary smile before she closed her eyes and laid her head on his shoulder. They both stared out the window, praying that the only man who had been their father would be safe.

There was a knock at the door, startling Ron out of his deep sleep from where he was lying in the pullout bed. He bolted up and looked

around before his sleepy eyes landed on Harry and Mia, who were watching him with amusement.

"Morning Ron," Harry greeted. "Nice to see that you're up on the job of being a bodyguard."

"Yeah?" Mia called out through the door and Hermione poked her head into the bedroom. "Hey, come on in, pull up a quilt," Mia told her. Hermione smiled and moved into the room, shutting the door behind her before climbing onto the bed next to Harry.

"Well, isn't this cosy," Ron stated from where he was nice and cosy in his bed - one that he had all to himself - and he wasn't complaining.

"What's up?" Harry asked Hermione, not answering Ron's question.

"Mrs. Weasley says we have to get ready for the train," Hermione told him and Mia sighed.

"Looks like Hogwarts isn't going to wait for anyone," Mia told them and got agreements in return.

They all stood up and went into their original rooms so that they each could get ready for their trip back to school.

Everybody made their way downstairs, dragging their trunks outside of the Leaky Cauldron where two Ministry cars sat, waiting to be loaded. Hermione raised an eyebrow at the cars, confused as to why they were getting to use Ministry cars to go to the train station.

Arthur noticed Hermione's hesitation and said, "The ministry supplied us with cars."

"Yeah, just in case Sirius decided to come back and kill us all," Fred, muttered to Mia, sarcastically.

"Though we wouldn't mind if he did it to Percy, he's been a very strange one lately," George added in.

"How to do mean?" Harry asked, overhearing the conversation. The twins turned to face him.

“He’s been keeping an eye on the rest of us, more specifically Mum and Ginny,” Fred explained to him. Harry cast his eyes over Fred’s shoulder and saw Percy standing there. He was standing off to the side, slightly away from his family as he watched them all stoically.

“Do you have any theory on why he’s doing that?” Harry asked and George shook his head.

“No, sorry,” George apologised. Harry just shrugged before he turned back to the others. “Let just get in the cars. The sooner we get to Hogwarts, the better, and we can start searching for information that could clear Uncle Sirius’ name.”

Everyone nodded and they all stepped into the car. Harry was sharing a car with Mia, Hermione, Ron, the twins and Ginny.

“Why are we all in here?” Ginny whined but everyone else just ignored her as they all fought to get comfortable in the suddenly tight space.

“Okay everyone, just stop!” Harry announced, causing everyone to stop squirming around and look at him. Harry sat down in the middle of the seat at the back of the car and pulled Hermione down onto his lap. Then Mia took the seat to Harry’s right and Ron took the seat to his left.

The twins and Ginny sat down across from the four and they all got settled.

“Why is Hermione sitting on your lap?” Ginny asked. Harry looked at her.

“Because there isn’t enough room,” Harry informed her.

“But surely she must be a bit heavy for you. I’m lighter, we could swap,” Ginny suggested and Harry snorted.

“No thanks. Besides – I’m used to having Hermione’s weight on me,” he told her before he turned back to Ron to finish their conversation. Harry was used to having Hermione’s weight on him because of training. They all needed to work together to get to high places –

because Harry and Draco were taller than the girls, it meant they were the ones to boost the girls up and Harry was paired with Hermione during the process.

Ginny on the other hand thought Harry meant something else. Hermione watched as Ginny's face crumbled with devastation before hardening and turning to look out the window.

Hermione just didn't get Ginny. She knew that Ginny was interested in Harry but she seemed to be taking it further than Harry wanted to. Harry had made it clear that he wasn't interested in her but Ginny didn't seem to be getting the message. She felt a hand on her elbow and turned to see her best friend attracting her attention.

"Leave it alone for now," Mia warned. "We don't need anymore trouble right now. She'll slip up sooner or later." Hermione nodded and they turned back to look out the other window.

They soon arrived at the train station. Everyone hurried out of the cars and grabbed their stuff before rushing through the barrier – they were once again running late thanks to traffic.

Everyone placed their trunks and animals in the baggage area before boarding the train.

"Have a good term!" Molly shouted as she waved to the children. Ron, Ginny, the twins and Percy waved back while Harry led Mia and Hermione down the corridors to get a compartment.

Everyone finally made their way over to a compartment. Ginny was about to step in when Ron lifted his hand.

"Sorry Ginny, there's not enough room for all of us. Why don't you go and sit with your friends?" Ron told her before he turned back away from her and entered the compartment.

Ginny just glared at Ron's back before she stomped off in the opposite direction. Everyone else made their way into the compartment and saw a young man sleeping in the corner. His robes were quite old and ragged. Harry couldn't help but eye the sleeping

man curiously. He had a nagging feeling that he recognised the person but couldn't place him.

"Who do you think he is?" Ron whispered to Harry.

"R.J.L. – I suspect he is the new Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher," Hermione informed them, matter of factly, causing Ron to look at her, scared.

"How do you know that?" he demanded before turning slightly wild eyes to Harry. "How does she know that?" Harry just smiled at Ron as he sat down next to Hermione while Ron and Mia took the other side of the compartment.

Ron was sitting next to the window while Mia was sitting closer to the door, waiting for the trolley to come along. Hermione was directly across from Mia next to the door while Harry was sitting in the middle between Hermione and the teacher.

"It says on his suitcase," Hermione intimated and Ron's eyes sought it out before spotting the engraving by the handle. The tip of his ears turned slightly pink with embarrassment.

"Oh," he muttered sheepishly, while Mia rolled her eyes in amusement.

"You can't blame Ron for being a little scared – you do have a habit of knowing things before anyone else," Harry teased Hermione, causing her to blush before she elbowed Harry in the side, causing Ron and Mia to stifle their chuckles, mindful of the young man who slept across from them.

"What do you think the ministry will be doing? I mean, they gave us cars to drive us to the train station," Ron told them and Mia shook her head.

"They are determined to bring him to justice for what they think he did. We need to find a way to capture the real person who did it and bring them forward," Hermione told them.

"But how?" Ron asked. "Peter has been declared dead remember, the ministry said that Sirius killed him."

"Yes, we know but Peter wouldn't kill himself off, no way," Harry told him. "He's biding his time. All we need to do is keep an eye out and an ear to the ground for any information that could possibly help us."

"That should be easy considering we're at school," Ron sarcastically told them and Mia sat up a little straighter.

"Maybe it is," Mia told them, causing them to look at the black haired girl. "Let me think it through first but I think I have an idea." A short rap at the door interrupted them and they turned to see the trolley lady standing at the doorway with a load full of sweets and snacks.

"Do you want anything off the trolley dears?" Mary the trolley lady asked.

"Yes please," Harry told her before looking at the rest. "Don't worry, I'm paying. So pick whatever you want."

"Thanks mate," Ron told him as all four of them stood up and looked through the category of sweets.

"What about the professor?" Hermione fretted slightly and Mary smiled at the young woman.

"Don't worry about him dear. He knows where I am if he gets hungry after he wakes," Mary soothed the young woman.

Hermione just smiled up at her before picking out a couple of sugar-free lollipops. Mia picked some red liquorice and a couple of regular lollipops. Harry and Ron had each grabbed a couple handfuls of sweets, proclaiming that it was ages until the feast was to start and they didn't want to starve.

Mary had just smiled affectionately at the young men before she took Harry's money and moved on to the next compartment.

The boys settled themselves back down on the small comfortable benches and started tucking into their snacks. Meanwhile they all started to talk about what they could be facing at Hogwarts.

“Do you think that Snape has left this time?” Ron asked almost hopefully while Mia snorted.

“Sorry, but I think we’re gonna be stuck with Snape for the rest of our school years,” Mia told him and Ron deflated.

“Guess it was too much to ask for,” Ron told them before he eyed the new professor thoughtfully. “Snape is gonna be hopping mad when he finds out that he missed out on the Defence Against the Dark Arts position again.”

“Why do you think Dumbledore is refusing to give him the position?” Hermione asked, curious to the old wizard’s reason. “I mean... our first-year professor was possessed and our second year teacher was a fraud. He has no problem letting Snape in on conversations he has with Harry yet he has problems giving the position to Snape.”

“Maybe because it’s rumoured that Snape is a Death eater,” Harry told her. Hermione looked at him. “Sirius says that Snape is a double spy – he spied on Voldemort and reported back to us, and vice versa to Voldemort.”

“Hm, maybe he was worried that Voldemort would tell Snape to do certain things in classes... like, give us assignments that Voldemort could use later in the future against us?” Ron suggested.

“But Voldemort is dead – well floating about basically - so there is no reason for Dumbledore not to give Snape the job now,” Mia pointed out.

“Maybe he knows that Voldemort isn’t going to stay dead forever and doesn’t want to give him the temptation?” Hermione asked. “I mean, when Voldemort does come back, Snape would find himself caught in a bind between Voldemort and Dumbledore - and in the process could end up exposing his double spy stature.”

"You could be right," Harry told them all. "But we're not gonna get any further by discussing it here."

The train started shuddering before it slowed down to a halt. Harry stood up, opened the compartment, and looked around only to see that the students were doing the same thing. All of them looked confused too.

Harry sat back down on the bench next to Hermione once more as he looked toward Mia and Ron.

"Why are we stopping?" Ron demanded.

"We can't be near Hogwarts already," Hermione told them as Mia leaned over Ron to look outside.

"Not unless Hogwarts has moved," Mia informed them. "We're on the bridge." She settled back into her seat before a slight shiver came over her. "God, is it just me or is it suddenly colder?"

"I think something is moving out there," Ron told them.

"What do you think it is?" Mia asked as she and Ron moved closer to the window. Hermione started to shiver next to Harry and her breath became noticeable in the cooling air.

"Oh shit," Ron muttered as he watched as the window began to ice over. "This is not a good sign."

There was a rattling sound coming from outside the compartment. Mia lunged at the door and pulled down the lever to lock it into place before she settled back down and looked at the others with fear shining brightly in her eyes.

"Just to be on the safe side," Mia told them. "We don't know what we're facing so we don't know how to fight them." Everyone nodded in agreement.

Soon a black shadow appeared against the door. Everyone turned to look at it while Harry grabbed Hermione and swapped places with her so she was away from the danger. The door handle started to turn

slightly, causing Harry and Mia to shoot a startled look towards each other; the door only locked from the inside so that there couldn't be any interrupting for people who were in a meeting. How it was opening now was puzzling.

The door slowly opened and a bony hand slid inside, causing Harry to push Hermione back as Mia and Ron scooted closer to the window. The black hooded figure slipped its head around and looked at each person in turn before its head looked straight at Harry.

Harry felt like he was drowning and was fighting against his growing weakness when a female scream sounded through his head.

"NO! Leave him alone!" a female voice shouted before she let out a scream as Harry fell backward into the growing darkness.

"Harry," a female voice called. Harry slowly opened his eyes and found himself staring into Hermione's worried brown orbs.

"Hermione," he whispered back and he saw relief flood into Hermione.

"Are you okay?" she asked. "You just passed out and started moving around like you were having a fit." Harry shook his head and felt sluggish.

"I don't feel so good," Harry admitted as Hermione helped him sit up properly. Ron and Mia were standing and helping Harry into an upright position. "What happened?"

"A Dementor came in. It took one look at you and started breathing really heavily, like it was taking in gulps of air. Your eyes just rolled up into the back of your head and you started thrashing around," Mia explained.

"Here," a male voice and a loud snapping sound made them all jump. They all turned to see the man who had been sleeping in the corner now wide-awake. He was breaking up a bar of chocolate. He leaned over to Harry and passed him a large piece.

Harry took it as the man stood up. "Eat the chocolate, it'll make you feel better. I need to have a word with the conductor and make sure

that everyone else is okay. I'll be back soon." With that, he walked out of the compartment.

"How the hell did a Dementor get on the train?" Harry asked, not once looking at the chocolate.

"No one knows – I think they were looking for Sirius because the man stood up, waved his wand and said that no one was hiding Sirius Black here. There was a bright white light and the Dementor screeched and fled pretty fast," Ron explained.

"Who screamed?" Harry asked. Mia, Hermione and Ron looked at each other, confused, before Hermione turned towards Harry once more.

"Harry, none of us screamed," Hermione told him and Harry frowned.

"I heard a female screaming," Harry told her and understanding lit up in Mia's blue eyes.

"Aunt Lily," Mia told them and Harry looked at her. "You heard your mum before she died. The reason why no one else was affected as much as you were because they didn't have the trauma of seeing their parent killed in front of them. You had buried it down deep and the Dementors brought it up," Mia explained and Harry sighed.

"Great," Harry muttered.

The doors opened once more, causing the teenagers to jump and then relax when the man came back in.

"Eat it Harry. I haven't poisoned it you know," the man teased slightly, noticing that Harry still had the block of chocolate in his hand. Harry chuckled nervously.

"Sorry," Harry told him before he frowned slightly. The man made his way back over to his usual seat. "Do I know you?" Harry asked and the man looked at him, startled.

"I'm Remus Lupin," Remus started. "I'm the new..."

“Moony!” Mia and Harry exclaimed together, causing Remus to stare at them both. “Unbelievable!” Mia exclaimed.

“Tell me about it!” Harry stated. “We were talking about you this summer and now you’re our teacher!”

“You were talking about me this summer?” Remus asked and Mia nodded.

“Yeah, you have no idea how many times we’ve tried to get dad to send a owl to you and explain everything. He’s sorry by the way that he couldn’t tell you anything. Aunt Lily and Uncle James made him promise because none of them were sure who the betrayer was. Dad was adamant that it wasn’t you and that you could be trusted but Aunt Lily was terrified you know,” Mia explained.

“Mia?” Remus asked as it suddenly clicked into place. “Oh my god. The last time I saw you, you were still a baby.”

“Funny how the years can go by,” Mia told him. “You have no idea how much Harry and I wanted to meet you but Dad was scared that you would turn him in if he had contacted you.”

“I probably would have,” Remus admitted. “But I do wish that the old dog had contacted me.”

“Is it true that you’re a werewolf?” Hermione asked suddenly, and Remus looked at her before smirking.

“How did you know?” Remus asked and Hermione blushed.

“Sirius told me about you – he explained that it was why he and James became animagi. Because you were a werewolf and to keep you company,” Hermione explained.

“You’ve met Sirius?” Remus asked.

“Hermione has been spending the summer with us – we’ve tried to get Ron invited too but you can guess that Mrs. Weasley is kinda overprotective,” Harry explained and Ron rolled his eyes.

"That's an understatement," Ron informed Harry before he looked at Remus. "How did you get bitten? I mean, were you a kid at the time?"

"Yeah, I was bitten by another werewolf. I was lucky that I was even accepted into Hogwarts but Dumbledore was understanding of my condition and Madam Pomfrey made me this potion that helped me to stay calm during my changes," Remus explained.

"Wolfbane," Hermione breathed out. "That's why Sirius wanted me to work on that potion; he said that I might need to know how to brew it someday. I think he was hoping that one of these days he would get himself cleared and you could come and live with them."

"He did?" Remus asked and Harry nodded.

"Yeah, he even has the room done up and a cage in the basement – when Mia and I first asked him about it, he said that that he hoped that an old friend would be able to come home soon," Harry explained.

Remus just turned to stare out of the window as a wave of sadness crossed his face. Harry looked at Mia and understanding dawned between them.

"So, did the conductor say why he stopped the train?" Hermione asked, changing the subject. Remus turned to face her.

"Apparently the ministry had told him to stop the train here so it could be searched," Remus explained and Ron rubbed his forehead.

"This is getting ridiculous," Ron muttered. "All they are doing is annoying the students, especially our house mates."

"Speak for yourself," Hermione remarked. "Mia and I have Lavender and Parvati - do you think they're going to be happy when they find out that Sirius is now on the run?"

"Wait a minute, are you telling me that your housemates have no problems with Sirius?" Remus interrupted, causing the kids to look at him.

“Yeah,” Ron told him. “Harry and Mia explained to us that Sirius isn’t the evil man that everyone had painted him to be, and they gave us good reasons for why Sirius would go after Peter. Plus why he would swap secret keepers.”

“And add in the fact that Sirius is not training me to be the next dark lord and that I try my best to make sure that Voldemort is not able to come back, and they’re on our side,” Harry informed him, dryly.

Remus chuckled. “Good points.” He sighed. “I wish that I hadn’t lost contact with him now.”

“Don’t worry,” Mia told him as she patted his arm. “You’re still our uncle and I have a feeling that Dad will be cleared soon. So you’ll be able to walk into the school together once more as free men.”

“And she says she hates divination,” Ron whispered to Harry, who covered his snickers.

“I heard that,” a warning tone came from Mia, who shot a glare at the boys, causing them to straighten up and put on their best innocent expressions.

“Oh, that just says you’re guilty,” Hermione scolded them. “Stop trying to look so innocent!” Remus smiled them, enjoying their banter as the train continued its journey to Hogwarts.

Once the train finally arrived, everyone rushed his or her way over to the castle. It was pouring down rain and there was plenty of thunder and lightning, startling the girls because it seemed to be growing closer. Hermione was fretting over the first years because they were travelling by boat.

“I sure hope they will be okay. The lake has to be turbulent,” Hermione told Harry. Harry just gripped her hand tighter, trying to reassure her as they made their way up the stairs to enter Hogwarts and get dry.

A blue blur came out of nowhere and landed at Harry’s feet, sending a spray of freezing cold water through his trainers. A red blur came

out of nowhere and hit a small first year on his back, re-soaking his robes.

“Oh hell, water balloons,” Ron groaned out. There was a hurried tapping noise and then a loud female voice shouting.

“PEEVES! STOP THAT THIS INSTANT!” McGonagall made her way over to the students only for her heels to slip on a wet patch. McGonagall’s hands flared as she tried to grab onto something to hold her up when a hand shot out and took hold of her robes and straightened her up.

McGonagall let out a small sigh of relief before she looked at the person who caught her and smiled at the young woman.

“Thank you Miss Black,” McGonagall told her and Mia nodded as she watched their head of the house go storming after Peeves. “Peeves get back down here!”

“Why don’t we just get rid of Peeves?” Harry whispered to Mia.

“Because I need him for my plans for Hogwarts,” Mia reminded Harry in a whisper.

“Okay everyone, let’s hurry into the Great Hall - and please mind your steps!” Percy called out as he led everyone into the castle as quickly as possible to get away from Peeves and his water bombs.

Soon the Great Hall doors came into view. Harry and Hermione were about to make their way inside when they caught sight of McGonagall looking like the worse for wear. Quite a few strands of hair were out of place due to her rushing about after Peeves and her cheeks were slightly flushed red due to her annoyance at the ghost.

Once the elderly woman had caught her breath, she straightened up until she looked more like her normal self before she caught sight of Harry and Hermione.

“Miss Granger, Mr. Potter, come with me please,” McGonagall told them. Harry and Hermione shared a look before they followed their

head of house. She led them up to her office. She allowed them to step through and they saw that the hospital nurse was in the office.

"Mr. Potter, the term hasn't even started and I already have to see you," Madam Pomfrey scolded him and Harry grinned as he shrugged at the nurse.

"What can I say? I just love your bedside manner," he teased. Madam Pomfrey just sent him a glare. It wasn't as effective as it could have been though because a hint of a smile was tugging at the corner of her lips.

"What happened?" she asked.

"Dementors," Harry explained and she nodded. She looked the young man over to make sure there were no lasting effects. "Professor Lupin gave me some chocolate to get over the incident."

"Good," Madam Pomfrey told him before she finally pulled away from him. "There are no lasting effects that I can see so you are free to go. Do not let me see you in the Hospital Wing anymore due to those foul things." Harry nodded.

"Okay Mr. Potter. Can you wait outside, I wish to speak to Miss Granger," Professor McGonagall told him. Harry gave a short nod before he left the office with Madam Pomfrey, who stalked off to her hospital wing muttering about the ministry being stupid and how could Dumbledore let them place Dementors around the school.

Harry just smiled fondly as he slipped his hands into his trouser pockets and leaned against the wall next to the office door. He knew that everyone would think that Madam Pomfrey was just being fussy, but he knew that the woman was very protective when it came to children in Hospital wing, especially when it came to intentional attacks like the whole ordeal with the Chamber of Secrets back in second year.

The door next to Harry opened and he turned to see Hermione and McGonagall stepping out of the office. Harry noticed that Hermione was slipping something gold under her jumper. He made a mental note to ask her about it later.

“Okay, now that’s over – let’s head back down to the Great Hall for the feast,” McGonagall told them as she led the way with Harry and Hermione following her. Hermione moved in closer and wrapped an arm around Harry’s elbow.

McGonagall opened the door and they stepped through. Harry and Hermione made their way over to the Gryffindor Table and sat down in their usual spot.

“Oh, we’ve missed the sorting,” Hermione whispered to Harry, who nodded back as they tucked into the feast.

“How come McGonagall wanted you?” Mia asked as she took a sip from her pumpkin juice.

“Madam Pomfrey was waiting for me. She wanted to make sure that there weren’t any lasting effects from the Dementors,” Harry explained.

“And McGonagall wanted to speak to me about my classes,” Hermione explained as the dishes started disappearing and Dumbledore stood up, attracting everyone’s attention to the Head Table.

“Students, I wish to welcome you all back to Hogwarts. First is that the new Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher is Professor Lupin,” Lupin stood up and waved to the students, who clapped. He sat back down again. “Second, I would advise you all to stay away from the forbidden forest.” Dumbledore’s face grew grave as he told them the next news. “I wish to let you all know that Hogwarts will be playing host to the Azkaban guards, the Dementors,” Dumbledore told them. There were mutterings and whisperers everywhere. “I must ask you not to provoke them as they will not show you any mercy – take care around them and give them no reason to harm you.”

“I can’t believe that Dumbledore is allowing those horrible things near the school,” Hermione told them as they made their way out of the Great Hall.

"I don't think he had a choice," Fred told them. "Did you see how furious he looked at the thought of them being near the school? I bet that Fudge forced his policies on him."

"Dad did say that Dumbledore threw a fit and told Fudge that he was the headmaster of the school. In the end they had to compromise. The Dementors are not allowed to cross onto school grounds while he is still headmaster because he fears for the safety of the students," George added in.

"I had thought that Dumbledore wanted Dad to be captured, but it now it seems like he is divided between helping us and trying to control us," Mia spoke up, curious to the reasons behind the Headmaster's actions. Ron leaned into her.

"The twins and I have a theory," Ron told her and they all looked at him. "We think that Dumbledore is trying to protect Harry the best way he can, and blood protection is very powerful. That's why he wants Harry to live at the Dursleys' - because the Death Eaters are still out there - but at the same time, he is fighting against it because he can see how well brought-up you and Harry are and has to admit that Sirius can't have been all that bad."

"Plus, everyone believes that Sirius was the secret keeper for your parents and, well, you know, everyone wants to believe the worst about someone," Fred told Harry, who nodded his understanding as he thought back to his second year.

"Why can't they accept the possibility that James and Lily had swapped secret keepers in the end?" Hermione asked.

"Because it's unthinkable to them that you would swap a secret keeper straight before you go into hiding. If you swapped around your best friend for someone else, what does that say?" George explained to the curious girl.

"Told you this world sucks," Mia informed Harry, who laughed while the twins rolled their eyes. Ron shook his head at Mia.

"I know you don't like this world but it has been like this for centuries – the purebloods are find change hard because they like the way things are," Ron explained to her.

"I'm sorry," Mia apologised. "But I find it hard that they can accept that raping muggleborn women just because they are muggleborns acceptable. That every single person who has been bitten by a werewolf can be classed as dark creatures. That all purebloods are more powerful than anyone else."

"There lies the rub," Harry told her. "They don't want to believe that a muggleborn or a half blood can be more powerful than them. They want to believe that purebloods are superior to anyone else."

"We know that's not true," Fred jumped in, defending his family. "The muggle world – while the Wizarding world doesn't want to believe it - is ahead of us in certain areas. Take cancer, for example. The Wizarding world doesn't know as much about it as they do."

"That's the reason why dad loves them so much," George dryly informed Mia. "It's because they have the means to get along without magic. They actually look at evidence before arresting someone and try and get justice – while they don't always get it, they at least gave them a fair trial. In this world, there have been cases where people are tried and hung before they even get a trial or just get sent to Azkaban without a trial at all."

"Lovely world we agreed to come to, isn't it?" Mia asked, sarcasm colouring her voice.

"And to think that Voldemort wants to keep only purebloods," Harry remarked sarcastically. Hermione covered her mouth to muffle her laughter as they finally reached the steps that would lead them to their house. Seamus ran ahead of everyone in an attempt to open the portrait. He arrived and saw that the painting of the Fat Lady was holding a wine glass goblet in her hand while singing.

"Fortuna Major," Seamus told her only to be ignored. "Fortuna Major," Seamus repeated.

"Just a minute," the Fat Lady told him before she started singing again. Seamus arched an eyebrow at the sight before he turned around and saw the rest of the Gryffindor walking up.

"She's not letting me in," Seamus told them and Harry looked at the Fat Lady.

"Fortuna Major," Harry told her and the Fat Lady held up her hand.

"Just a minute!" she told them before she started to sing again. Her voice started screeching, causing everyone nearby to cover their ears before she smashed the glass into the wall and let out a breathless gasp. "And it was just my voice!" she breathed out.

"Fortuna Major!" Harry repeated and she scowled.

"Fine, go on then," she told him as she opened the passageway and let them through.

"Every frigging year she does that and she can't even sing," Seamus and Harry stated at the same time, causing giggles from the girls surrounding them.

"Great start of the school term," Mia whispered to Hermione, who shot her a look filled with mirth before she turned back to face Harry.

"It's late. Lets all go to bed... and boys," Hermione called out, causing Ron, Dean, Seamus and Neville to look at her. "Do not make too much noise this time. I don't want to get out of my warm bed just to hex you." With that, Hermione made her way up the stairs with Lavender and Parvati, who were giggling. Mia shrugged at Harry.

"What can I say, I must be rubbing off on her," Mia told him only to dash up the stairs as Harry grabbed a cushion and threw it at her, missing her by inches. "See you in the morning!" and she ran up the stairs to catch up with the rest.

"First years," Percy called out and the first years looked at him. "Boys dormitories are up to your right, girls, you're to the left."

"Girls, over here," they heard Hermione call out. She had come back downstairs to make sure that the first year's girls got to their room. The girls made their way over to her while Harry called over the boys and led them up to their room.

Later Hermione and Mia were lying in their beds as they both stared at the ceiling. It was nearly midnight, but neither girl could sleep. Hermione closed her eyes before she let out a long sigh, then opened them once more.

"What do you think will happen this year?" Hermione asked as she turned on her side to look at Mia in the darkness. Mia shook her head.

"I have no idea," Mia whispered back and both girls lapsed into silence, each hoping that Sirius was okay wherever he was.

Meanwhile, a large black dog climbed down a small hill to stand near a large body of water. Hogwarts was just across the lake. The dog sat down and stared across the motionless water at Hogwarts for a long time.

TBC

Chapter 4: Time Tables, Classes and Problems.

Harry muttered to himself as he made his way downstairs to the common room dressed in his school clothes and robes. He ran a hand through his hair with the sole affect of making his hair spikier than usual.

He stopped when he saw Hermione curled up on the couch reading her book. Harry couldn't help but grin. It was one of the things he loved about Hogwarts - coming down the stairs to see Hermione curled up on the couch.

Harry moved around and sat down next to Hermione. Hermione looked up from her book and smiled when she saw him.

"Hey, did you have a good sleep?" Hermione asked. Harry shrugged.

"Not really. I kept thinking about Sirius," Harry admitted and Hermione sighed and marked her book before she closed it, placed it on the table, and moved in closer.

"He'll be fine. He managed to hide from the ministry for almost twelve years. He can hide a little bit longer until we find a way to clear his name," Hermione promised as she placed a hand on Harry's shoulder.

"I know," Harry sighed as he laid the back of his head on the couch. "But it doesn't stop me from worrying."

"I know," sighed Hermione. Harry remembered something as he turned to face Hermione once more.

"Hey, what did McGonagall give you last night?" Harry asked. Hermione looked at him, puzzled. "I saw you tucking something gold under your jumper."

"That was nothing Harry, just a necklace that fell out. I was tucking it back in because I didn't want it to get tugged off by Peeves, you know what he's like," Hermione told him, not once meeting his eyes. Harry nodded.

“Uh huh,” a disbelieving tone came from him and she started to glare in response. “Fine,” Harry held up his hands. “You don’t want to tell me. But will you promise if it becomes dangerous or something like that that you will tell me?” Hermione smiled softly at him, pleased with his concern.

“Yes, I promise,” she promised him, looking deep into his green eyes. Harry smiled back before his eyes ended up settling down to her lips. He noticed that her tongue snuck out and licked her bottom lip before he looked back up into her eyes once more.

Hermione couldn’t breathe as she watched Harry move in closer. Her eyes closed halfway as she also moved in closer. Their noses almost met when a cough interrupted them, freezing them on the spot as they stared at each other, mixed emotions fighting in their eyes.

“We better get down to breakfast,” a cold female voice said. Harry and Hermione looked over the back of the couch to see Ginny standing there with her arms crossed over her chest. “We can’t be too late.” With that, she walked out of the Common room.

Harry looked back at Hermione before his eyes flickered down to her lips and he sighed. The moment was lost.

“She’s right,” Harry told Hermione as he stood up and held out his hand. “Would you like to join me for breakfast?” Hermione smiled.

“I would like that very much,” Hermione told him as she slipped her hand into his. They both walked out of the common room, holding hands.

Mia and Ron came downstairs with a furious look on their faces.

“I don’t know what the hell is up with your sister but she is beginning to drive me nuts,” Mia warned Ron, who agreed.

“Trust me, I know. She has been asking me questions about you lot all over the summer. Makes me wonder what she is up to,” Ron told her.

“Well, we know she wants Harry,” Mia reminded.

“Let me talk it over with the twins, maybe they can shed some insight into what is going on with Ginny,” Ron suggested and Mia nodded.

“Okay, do it tonight. I’ll be talking to my soon-to-be-source and see if I can get information on how to clear Dad’s name,” Mia told him as they both walked out of the common room.

Neither of them saw Percy sitting in the chair in the corner. He had seen Harry and Hermione’s near-kiss when Ginny had come down the stairs and interrupted them. He frowned when he considered the angry look that had passed over Ginny’s face. It was like she felt she was being betrayed. Percy sighed before shaking his head sadly. His mother had spoiled her too much.

Everyone made their way into the Great Hall. Seamus was laughing at something Dean had told him before he turned to face Harry, who sat down next to Hermione. Mia and Ron sat across from them.

“Hey Harry, did you hear?” Seamus asked, causing Harry to look at him curiously.

“Hear what?” Harry asked.

“Hagrid is the new professor for Care of Magical Creatures,” Seamus excitedly told him, causing Harry’s jaw to drop from shock.

“Are you serious?” Harry demanded and Seamus nodded.

“The reason it wasn’t announced last night was because Hagrid was busy doing something else. Dumbledore didn’t want to tell anyone until Hagrid was here too,” Seamus explained.

“That explains the book,” Ron told them as he tucked into his breakfast.

“Great, this means we’ll have more information on creatures – Hagrid knows almost everything about every creature out there - including things that aren’t in the book,” Mia exclaimed, excitement bubbling in her voice.

"Is that all it takes to get you excited?" Dean asked in amusement. Mia rolled her eyes briefly before she shot him a grin, cupped her chin in her hand, and gave him a serious look.

"That's for me to know and you to find out," she teased him. Harry just looked at Mia in shock.

"Mia, you're flirting!" Harry scolded, causing Mia to look at him before she started laughing at his horrified expression.

"What? Are you the only one who's allowed to flirt?" Mia teased. "I sure saw some flirting happening this morning." Hermione blushed as she grabbed her toast and started to butter it while Ron choked on his sausages trying to fight back his laughter. Harry flushed but just glared at his cousin.

"Who was Harry flirting with?" Lavender asked as she sat down next to Mia and saw Hermione's blushing face. It must have clicked, because next she squealed, "Oh my god, you two kissed!" causing everyone to stop what they were doing.

Harry and Hermione just flushed even further.

"NO, we didn't!" Harry informed her, heatedly. "And even if we did, it wouldn't be anyone business."

"Oh come on," Lavender started but Mia clamped her hand over the blonde-haired girl's mouth.

"You know what she's like. She just likes to gossip," Mia cut in. Harry just narrowed his eyes at them before he turned back to Hermione and took the knife out of her hand when he saw that there was no bread left to butter because she had scraped it away.

Mia turned back to Lavender. "Don't try and piss him off - I have a feeling that he will blow something up if he does," she whispered to the girl. Lavender nodded as Mia unclamped her mouth before she looked at Mia.

"Hey, what's up with Ginny?" Lavender asked, nudging her head in Ginny's direction. Mia turned her head and looked past Ron to catch

sight of Ginny glaring at Hermione, then shooting Harry a heartbroken look.

Mia sighed and turned back to Lavender. "She has a crush on Harry and has been making it clear since she arrived," Mia explained. Lavender sighed as well.

"I sure hope that she will get over her crush soon. The way Harry and Hermione keep getting closer – it looks like that Ginny might not get her dream," Lavender told Mia, who agreed as she tucked into her toast.

Both girls looked toward Harry and Hermione. Harry had buttered Hermione another piece of toast, telling her that he wasn't going to allow her to use a knife today. Though Hermione looked annoyed Mia could also see that she was milking it for all it was worth.

"Students," a female voice spoke up and everyone turned to see McGonagall heading toward them. "Good morning students, here are your schedules," she informed them.

"What do you think we have first today?" Parvati asked as Mia stood up once McGonagall called out her name and took her schedule from her.

"Oh no!" the black haired girl moaned.

"What?" Ron mumbled around the food in his mouth.

"We have divination first!" Mia exclaimed.

"With who?" Fred asked as he moved up behind Mia to look at her schedule before he snickered. "Trelawney. I pity you."

"Why?" Seamus asked as he stood up and took his timetable from McGonagall.

"Because she likes to predict death all the time," George explained before he and Fred shared a grin. "Okay... who wants to bet on who'll get the most death predictions this year?"

“Boys,” McGonagall warned and the twins turned to look at her.

“Don’t worry Professor, you can join in too,” Fred told her, cheekily. She just glared at them before she turned back to her other students, unwilling to let the twins get to her.

“How much?” Dean asked.

“Five Sickles to enter, then whatever you want to spend on the person,” George explained.

“Fine,” Lavender told them as she dug out some money and handed it to the twins. “Here’s your five Sickles. Two galleons on...who do we have the class with?” Lavender asked Mia, who looked at her timetable.

“Ravenclaw,” Mia supplied her and Lavender nodded.

“Terry Boots - that boy keeps getting on my nerves,” Lavender told the twins. “He keeps looking over at our table, too” she explained to everyone else, who spun around in their seats to see a young man over at the Ravenclaw table. He had light brown hair and dark brown eyes. He blushed when he saw that he had been caught before he looked back down at the book that was in his hand.

“Probably fancies you,” Dean told Lavender before he turned to the twins.

“Here’s five sickles and three gallons on Harry Potter,” Dean told them. Harry looked at him, startled.

“Oi, how come you're picking me?” Harry asked, insulted.

“Mate, you have faced death more than us – she’ll likely know that,” Ron explained to Harry, who just shot him a disgruntled glare while Hermione covered her smile while rubbing Harry’s back in a comforting way.

“Miss Granger, here’s your timetable,” McGonagall called out as she passed a slip of paper to the young woman.

"Thank you!" Hermione thanked her as she took a look at her timetable. Ron was leaning over behind Hermione at this point to grab some rolls at the other side of the table and glanced at Hermione's schedule as she received it.

"Just exactly how many classes are you taking!?" Ron asked as she tucked her timetable out of the way so he couldn't look at it any further.

"A fair few," Hermione retorted, causing Harry and Mia to look at each other.

"How much is a fair few?" Mia asked, curious.

"A few," Hermione replied, vaguely. Ron just threw up his hands in frustration before he turned to the twins.

"Here's five sickles, put me down for two galleons on Hermione Granger," Ron informed the twins, handing them the money before moving out of Hermione's range as she turned to hit him.

"Where is he?" she breathed out.

"Hiding, that's where he is," Fred told them, amused.

"Here's five sickles, 3 galleons that Hermione will kill Ron before the day is over," Harry told them as he handed the money over.

"Oh thanks Harry," Ron exclaimed, insulted. Everyone else just laughed while McGonagall just shook her head.

"How on earth do I live with you lot?" she asked them as she finished handing out the timetables.

"Because you love us Professor McGonagall, and you couldn't imagine life without us if we weren't here to brighten your day," The twins stated together. McGonagall's lips just thinned as she narrowed her eyes at her lions before clapping her hands.

"Class, the lot of you," she ordered them and watched as everyone packed up their stuff and headed out of the Great Hall, laughing and chatting animatedly as they went to start the day.

McGonagall finally allowed herself a small smile as she watched them all go. She had to admit, the twins were right. Without her lions, her day would just be normal every day. With her third years and the twins, there was never a dull day. With that, she walked out of the Great Hall, intending to get her lessons ready.

"Where is our Divination class?" Parvati asked as they walked.

"North tower," Harry told them and Lavender balked.

"The north tower? Does anyone here actually know where that is?" Lavender demanded.

"Sure, it's the opposite of the south tower," Seamus replied, causing Ron to snicker and Mia to roll her eyes.

"Let's just get a move on so we can get to class on time," Mia told them and they all sped up until they reached the stairs and came to a crossroad.

"Okay, left or right, take your pick," Harry told them.

"I think it's down this way," Hermione suggested as she tilted her head to the right but Ron shook his head.

"No, that's south, you can still see the lake," Ron pointed out and everyone saw a small patch of the lake through the window.

"So, left then," Dean stated and they all headed left only to come to another crossroad.

"Oh god, just kill me," Mia moaned as she rubbed her forehead. "Is this castle trying to drive us nuts?"

"Let's ask a painting for help," Harry suggested. They looked around and Harry caught sight of a knight in a painting. He walked over

towards him only for the knight to jump back and thrust his sword at Harry.

"Aha! What villains are these that trespass upon my private lands! Come to scorn my fall, perchance? Draw, you knaves! Fight, you dogs!" the knight shouted as he waved his sword only for it to fall and sink down into the ground.

Hermione just arched an eyebrow at the situation before she shook her head, wondering why on earth Dumbledore kept this picture.

"Listen, we're looking for the north tower, do you know where it is?" Hermione asked and the knight looked up at her, his rage vanishing.

"A quest!" He exclaimed. "Follow me, dear friends, and we shall find our goal or else perish bravely in the charge." He grabbed his sword out of the ground and mounted his horse while Mia just muttered under her breath.

"You'd think we were going to battle," she rolled her eyes before the knight disappeared from the painting and showed up in the next one, causing everyone to chase after him. They climbed up the spiral staircase, feeling dizzy and dizzy as they climbed even higher until they finally came to a stop.

The girls leaned against the wall, breathing heavily and shaking their heads to get the dizziness back under control. The boys didn't look any better as they were hunched over with their hands on their knees. Once they were able to breathe again, they looked around and saw the knight in a painting once more.

"Farewell! Farewell, my comrades-in-arms! If you ever have need of noble heart and steely sinew, call upon Sir Cadogan!" he disappeared from sight.

"Yeah, we'll call you if we ever need someone... insane," Ron muttered under his breath as his breathing started to get back to normal.

Harry just looked around until he spotted a trapdoor in the ceiling. Squinting his eyes, he saw that it had 'Professor Sybill Trelawney, Divination Teacher' written upon a gold plaque.

"Oh, that's wonderful. How the heck are we supposed to get up there?" Harry demanded. An answer came down in the form of a sliver rope ladder. Harry just stared at it while Ron smirked.

"You first," Ron informed him.

Once everyone had climbed the ladder and entered their classroom, they found themselves bombarded with heavy scents of lavender and smoke. There were tables scattered all over the room with Crystal balls on top of velvet purple cushions in the middle of each table.

Everyone grabbed a seat, with Harry, Ron, Hermione and Mia sharing a table together. Mia reached out and touched the crystal ball, noticing that the insides started to cloud up before she pulled her hand away as a figure came into the classroom.

"Welcome," she greeted. She was covered in bright clothes and lots of jewellery, including different coloured bangles all clinking together on her wrists and several different types of necklaces adorning her neck. Her glasses seemed to be too large for her and seemingly magnified her eyes. "It is nice to see you at last in the physical world."

"What, we were dead?" Mia whispered to Harry, who looked away to hold back his laughter.

Professor Trelawney continued to tell everyone about what to expect in her class before she finally got them to each grab a teacup and fill them with tealeaves and water.

"Drink up, dears, time for you to tell the future," she told them, causing everyone to drink the hot water as quick as they could without burning themselves. "Now swap cups with the person sitting next to you." Hermione and Mia switched cups while Harry and Ron traded theirs. "Now, look and see what you can See."

"Wonderful," Ron muttered as he looked through his book while studying Harry's cup. "Okay, You have some sort of bowler hat – hey,

that means the Ministry. Then you have an..." Ron turned the cup. "An acorn – which is...an unexpected windfall of money. Then you have what seems like a animal – yeah, there's it head!" Ron exclaimed and Harry snickered, causing Trelawney to turn around and look at the two of them before she moved over and took Harry's cup out of Ron's hand.

"Let me see," she informed them before she looked at the cup. "You have the falcon – meaning you have a very dangerous enemy out there."

"That we know," Hermione muttered under her breath. Trelawney took no notice of her as she turned the cup once more.

"The skull indicates danger on your path..." she turned the cup once more and let out a gasp before screaming, startling everybody. "Oh my, the Grim!"

"The grim?" Hermione asked, puzzled.

"It's the worst thing for a wizard or witch to foresee because it's an omen of death," Dean recited from his book. "It comes in the form of a black dog."

"Oh, poor Rex," Mia told Harry.

"Who is Rex, my dear?" Professor Trelawney asked and Mia arched an eyebrow at her.

"Aren't you supposed to see things that no one else can? Shouldn't you already know who Rex is?" Mia asked only to get an affronted look from the woman and a roll of her eyes. "Fine, Rex is Harry's dog – a pure black dog, mind you, and Harry has had him since he was a puppy. Fascinating how Harry is still alive after interacting with the Grim all the time, isn't it?"

"The Grim is a magical dog, little girl, and therefore it will cross your path," Trelawney informed her. "Mister Potter has an enemy!"

"Well, we already kinda know that," Hermione informed the woman, dryly.

"Excuse me?" Trelawney asked.

"We excuse you," Mia remarked causing Harry to bite his bottom lip as the teacher shot Mia a glare.

"Voldemort is Harry's enemy – considering he did try to kill Harry when he was a baby and the last two times while we were here at Hogwarts," Hermione jumped in.

"But he's dead! So it means that Mr Potter here must have another enemy," Trelawney informed her. Hermione just glared even harder at her when a new voice startled them.

"I win!" Dean shouted, causing everyone to look at him and his skin to darken even more. "Sorry," he whispered as he sat down, causing the Gryffindors to snigger as the bet came back to them.

"Class dismissed!" Trelawney told them. "I need to rest my inner eye." With that, she walked away from them and everyone walked out of class.

"Now that was productive," Mia told them.

"If she had told me that two years ago, I'd probably have believed her," Harry told Mia, who just rolled her eyes as they continued down towards Hagrid's hut.

"That was the largest waste of time I've ever had in a class," Hermione informed them. "My Arithmancy class was much more insightful." Ron frowned.

"And just *how* many classes are you taking again?" Ron asked once more.

"As I told you, a fair few," Hermione replied, causing Harry and Ron to look at each other before something else struck Ron.

"Wait a minute. Arithmancy is on at the same time as Divination. The only way you could have been there was if you were in two places at the same time," Ron informed her.

"Don't be silly, how can you be in two places at the same time?" Hermione informed him before she giggled. "Good thing that Harry didn't decide to pop his clogs because he saw a black dog." She moved ahead of everyone while Harry, Ron and Mia slowed their steps and stared after the bushy-haired girl.

"Just how is she getting to her classes?" Mia asked, puzzled and Harry shook his head.

"She won't tell me anything," Harry told her. "Besides, she would tell us if it was dangerous, right?"

"Yeah, of course she would," Ron, agreed, though not convincingly. Mia shook her head.

"We're not gonna get answers by just standing around. We better hurry to Hagrid's class," Mia told them and they sped up.

Soon, they arrived at Hagrid's hut. Hagrid came out and waved to the students.

"Morning kids! Come along, I have a real treat for you all today," Hagrid informed them. He led them around the back of his hut and to a big clearing next to the woods.

"Okay kids, open your books, and I'll get the animal that we are going to study," Hagrid told them before he walked off. Pansy was staring at him with an arched eyebrow.

"And *how* do you open the book?" Pansy asked in a sarcastic tone, causing giggles from the female Slytherins.

"You stroke the spine, Pansy," Mia shot at her.

"And how would you know?" Pansy asked with a sneer and Mia rolled her eyes.

"I asked the shop keeper. He was quite happy to help people if you just asked him," she informed Pansy before moving next to Hermione, who giggled before turning back to the front.

“God, wait till I tell my father what is going on here, the place is going to the dogs,” Pansy muttered. Mia looked at her with an eyebrow arched.

“Now you’re growing a backbone!?” Mia demanded incredulously, causing Hermione to bury her face into Harry’s shoulder who just rolled his eyes at Mia.

“Listen here you little...” Pansy started but faltered when Mia stood in front of her, not backing away an inch.

“What? Little what?” Mia demanded. “Just because you think you are a pureblood doesn’t mean that you are better than the lot of us.” Pansy drew herself to her full height.

“You really think so?” Pansy sneered and Mia smirked.

“Well, Hermione is a muggleborn and she is getting better grades than any pureblood in the world, isn’t she?” Mia remarked. “Not to mention that Harry’s mother was a muggleborn and she got high grades as well.”

Pansy’s mouth just opened and closed, looking remarkably like a fish. “And do close your mouth unless you wish to catch flies.” With that, Mia turned her back and walked over to the Gryffindor class.

Draco just smirked to himself as he moved over to the rock fence to pull himself up on it before he opened his book. Everyone else did the same as they waited for Hagrid to come back.

Draco had been keeping an eye on Pansy ever since her first spat with Mia back in first year. Pansy was determined to get one up on Mia to prove that purebloods were better, but she hadn’t managed to score a point yet. Probably because Mia was street smart.

Hagrid came out of the forest with a creature following him. Draco noticed that it was half horse and half eagle; the top half with the head was of an eagle went down to its mid-back, which was normally found on a horse.

Draco smiled to himself when he saw this. Mia was going to love Care of Magical Creatures Class this term.

“What is that, Hagrid?” Ron asked, fear entering his voice.

“Hippogriffs!” Mia squealed with delight and Hagrid beamed at her.

“Ten points to Gryffindor,” Hagrid told her. “You can come a little closer if you want.” Mia was the only one who rushed nearer to the creatures while everyone else hung back a little way.

“Well, Mia doesn’t seem to think they’re dangerous,” Neville spoke up.

“Mia like all kinds of animals, regardless if they are dangerous or not,” Harry informed him as they all moved closer, trusting that Hagrid wouldn’t bring something that would harm them.

Once they were all closer, Hagrid beamed.

“Okay, first thing you gotta know about Hippogriffs is that they are very proud creatures. You never want to insult one because it may be the last thing you ever do,” Hagrid warned them in a firm tone, making it clear that they couldn’t insult one. “When you do approach one, you bow first and keep eye contact. The less you blink, the better. Once they’ve accepted you, they will bow back and you can go near them. Mind you, if they think you are untrustworthy, you are better off staying away from them.” Hagrid looked around his class to make sure that everyone was listening carefully before he clapped his hands. “Okay, who would like to go first?”

“I’ll go,” Harry jumped in. He was interested in hippogriffs and wanted to see what it would be like to touch one.

“Oh no, Harry, your tea leaves,” Lavender moaned. Mia rolled her eyes.

“The tea leaves indicated Harry would die if he sees a black dog, not a hippogriff,” Mia reminded her as Harry moved forward.

Once Harry was a few feet away from the hippogriff, he bowed while keeping eye contact with the creature.

The hippogriff eyed Harry closely before it sunk down into a bow, leaving Hagrid relieved and Gryffindors cheering softly. Harry moved in closer and stroked the Hippogriff's beak before moving to its feathery neck.

"Well done, Harry, well done," Hagrid praised. "I knew that Buckbeak would take to you." Mia just raised an eyebrow at the name. "Maybe he would let you fly him."

"What?" Harry asked as he turned horrified eyes toward Hagrid only to find himself being lifted up into air and down onto Buckbeak's back. Hagrid slapped Buckbeak's rear, provoking Buckbeak into taking a running leap as he soared into the air.

"Alright!" Ron cheered and everyone ran toward the stone fence where Draco was sitting.

"Whoa!" Draco yelled as he swung his body and jumped off the ledge onto the other side when everyone crashed into the stone, looking for Harry. Draco just shook his head. "Bloody hell." He stared at his former seat with a mournful look. "And that was my seat."

Harry found himself soaring over Hogwarts Lake. Buckbeak moved down closer and dipped his claw into the water while Harry sat up and spread his arms, enjoying the feel of the wind against his face. Buckbeak pulled up away from the water to soar up higher in the air and started to circle Hogwarts with Harry clinging onto his back, enjoying the ride.

Hagrid brought his fingers up to his mouth and whistled loudly, causing Buckbeak to complete his loop around Hogwarts and fly back over to where Hagrid was calling him.

Buckbeak came down to land with a small thud before slowing for a few feet until he finally came to a stop.

"Way to go, Harry!" his classmates cheered as they all hurried over to him. Harry swung his body around and jumped off of Buckbeak's back. Hagrid threw Buckbeak a dead ferret as a treat before he leaned in closer to Harry.

“How am I doing?” Hagrid asked softly and Harry grinned.

“Great class, Professor Hagrid,” Harry told him and Hagrid smiled only to straighten up when he saw that Pansy was pushing her way through the class to get near Buckbeak.

“Oh, if Potter can do it, then everyone else would be able to,” Pansy informed them as she moved closer to Buckbeak, who backed up slightly from the girl.

“Pansy,” Hagrid warned.

“You’re not dangerous at all, are you, you stupid ugly brute!” Pansy insulted. Buckbeak let out a screech before he reached up on his hind legs and slashed a claw down Pansy’s arm, scratching her and ripping the fabric of her robes.

Hagrid ran in front of Buckbeak as Pansy fell to the ground, screaming. Mia moved forward, angry with the young woman.

“You stupid idiot!” Mia snapped as she yanked Pansy off the ground while Hagrid tried to calm Buckbeak. “What is it with you death nibblers, can’t you deal with the fact that your stupid lord has been killed off by a one year old baby!? You need to go and get yourself killed?”

“It attacked me! Unprovoked!” Pansy shouted back at Mia, who just glared at her.

“You insulted him! Hagrid made it pretty clear that you couldn’t insult a hippogriff! Even if you couldn’t understand Hagrid, you should have read the damn book – the information is written clearly right there! That is, unless you can’t read,” Mia retorted before she shook her head. “Hagrid, you better take her up to the hospital wing before I put in her a coffin.”

Hagrid nodded as he moved over and scooped Pansy into his arms and took her up to the hospital wing with everyone watching them go.

“Great, now she’ll get her father to talk to someone who works for the ministry and they’ll try and do something to hurt Hagrid,” Ron

exclaimed. Harry sighed as Buckbeak made his way over to Harry and nuzzled him. He stroked Buckbeak's beak and smiled softly while he looked at the rest of the class.

"We gotta do whatever it takes to prevent that," he told them and they all nodded. His eyes caught Draco's, who was standing at the back, and he nodded discreetly.

Everyone made their way back to Hogwarts. Classes were done for the day and the students from Gryffindor were in a sombre mood.

"Hagrid will probably get into trouble over this," Seamus told Harry, who nodded his agreement.

"I know," Harry told him.

"If anyone is to get into trouble, it's that stupid bitch," Mia raged as they entered the common room. "I swear to God, I will find some way to bring her down."

"Mia, right now we need to focus on Hagrid and how can we help him," Hermione told Mia as she placed a hand on her shoulder to calm her down. Mia closed her eyes and took a deep breath before she opened them once more, somewhat calmer.

"First thing we must do is find some way to prevent Hagrid from losing his enthusiasm in class," Mia told them and Hermione nodded.

"I'll talk to him and tell him that it should be okay to keep bringing in the creatures we're supposed to study," Hermione told her.

"Then we have to prepare for whatever curve ball Pansy will throw at us. I have a feeling that she will talk to her father to do something about Hagrid, so we need to be on guard for the Ministry. They'll try to do something to him," Mia told them.

"I'll keep a look out for the Ministry; they'll probably want to interrogate me anyway," Harry told her and Mia sighed as she turned to Ron.

“And you and I will go through the library – as your dad works for the ministry, there has to be some loophole we can find to protect Hagrid in all this,” Mia told him and Ron nodded, not once objecting over the thought of being in the library.

“I’m going to talk to the twins,” Ron told them as he shot Mia a look, one that Mia understood straight away.

“Oh yes, that’s right. I made plans with someone earlier. I’ll try not to be back too late,” Mia told them before she bolted out of the common room. Ron made his way out of the common room at a slower pace than Mia, intending to seek out the twins.

Harry and Hermione exchanged puzzled looks.

“What was that about?” Hermione asked. Harry just shrugged in reply, not having an answer. Harry looked at Hermione once more and bit his bottom lip, wondering if he should bring up what had almost happened this morning or just leave it.

He had thought about it all day, wondering if they would have shared their first kiss if Ginny hadn’t interrupted them, or wondering if it would have been a mistake. He ran a hand through his hair. He knew he really liked Hermione and that his attraction only grew the longer he was with her. He had understood that Hermione had been wary of their crush back at the end of last year; hell, he had been wary over it too, but ever since puberty had kicked in, he had found himself having dreams of Hermione and he wasn’t sure what to do with them.

Sirius was on the run, so Harry couldn’t contact him. He couldn’t talk to Draco either because Dumbledore had been keeping a closer eye on him on. And there was no way he was going to be able to talk to Ron about this. While Ron and Draco were his best mates, Ron did have a tendency to let things slip and he didn’t want anything getting back to Hermione. He couldn’t go to Draco, either. With everything else that was going on, he didn’t want to alert Dumbledore and risk exposing Draco too early.

Meanwhile Hermione was studying Harry out of the corner of her eye before she looked back at the fire. She had been debating with herself if she should bring up what had almost happened this morning.

She wanted to figure out what it meant, but at the same time was scared that Harry would brush it off like it was an accident, like he had gotten caught up in the moment and wanted to keep it at that. She bit her bottom lip with worry.

Ever since she had seen Harry again in the summer, she found herself fantasizing and dreaming about him in such a way that made her blush whenever she came back to reality. As much as she loved Mia, she was a bit hesitant to tell Mia these personal things. And there was no way she was going to tell her mum about what was going on. Her dad was already hesitant about boys and girls sharing the same tower together without any direct supervision, so she didn't want to know what he would do if he found out that she was attracted to a boy.

"Harry..."

"Hermione..." they both started and looked at each other, startled, before they each let out a small laugh.

"Sorry, you go first," Harry, told her and Hermione smiled her thanks.

"About this morning," she started and Harry nodded, eagerly. "Erm...was it because we were caught up in the moment?"

"I don't know, I guess," Harry told her and Hermione nodded. "I guess it was as sign saying that we weren't supposed to kiss." Hermione looked at him before giving him a false smile.

"Yeah, I mean, we are best friends and if we were to get together, we'll probably end up breaking up and ruining our friendship. And I, for one, don't want that to happen," Hermione told him and Harry shot her a false smile of agreement.

"Yeah, same here," Harry told her. "So, friends?" Harry asked and Hermione nodded.

"Friends," she repeated and they both hugged and looked past each other, not happy with just being friends.

If Mia had been there, she probably would have whacked their heads together.

“So, what are you going to do?” Draco asked from where he was sitting in an empty classroom in an unused hallway. He was sitting on the teacher’s desk while he watched as Mia pace the floor in front of him.

“I gotta figure out some way to stop anything happening to Hagrid and Buckbeak,” Mia told him. “But to do that, I need to find some way to permanently shut up that stupid bint.”

“The Parkinsons and the Malfoys are pretty good friends – they go way back thanks to Voldemort’s views,” Draco told her. “If Pansy tells her father then he’ll contact my father and my dad will go to Fudge and put in a complaint,” Draco told her. Mia ran a hand through her hair before an idea came to her and a sly smile crept up her face. Draco arched an eyebrow when he saw this. “And you have a plan.”

“Yeah, I do. If they want a war then they’ll have one. But it’s gonna be on my terms and no one else’s,” Mia informed him, leaving Draco curious as to just what her plan was.

TBC

Chapter 5: DADA, Hogsmeade and Trouble.

Harry was making his way towards the Great Hall the next morning. Hermione, Mia and Ron had already gone down for breakfast because Ron had been complaining that his stomach had thought his throat had been cut. Harry was taking advantage of this to make a discreet rendezvous with his secret ally.

Harry slipped into an unused classroom. He closed the door behind him and nodded when he saw Draco sitting at the desk.

"What's going on?" Draco asked as Harry moved closer to him.

"Molly opened her big mouth; Sirius' disguise charm had worn off without him knowing it. Molly saw him come out of his room and started shouting like a mad woman. Thanks to her, Uncle Sirius is now on the run for his life, god knows where. Mia is putting on a false front to make everyone think she is coping but Hermione tells me that she sometimes sneaks out of bed and goes into the bathroom to have a cry. Hermione has all these extra classes that she seems to be getting to but she is not telling us anything," Harry quickly itemized for him. Draco sighed as he rubbed his forehead.

"Mum is trying to get in contact with Uncle Sirius. She thinks he might be hiding out in one of the muggle homes that he purchased, but so far she's come up empty," Draco told him.

"Great," Harry muttered. "It would be nice if he could let us know how he is so that Mia is not worrying over him all the time. But then again, I have a feeling that our mail is being monitored." Draco agreed.

"It is. I noticed that one of my letters from my mum didn't seem to be sealed completely. Mum always seals her letters all the way, so someone has been going through my mails. The question is why though; no one knows about us," Draco told him. Harry frowned.

"Could it be that they think your father knows where Sirius is hiding and thinks he might tell you so you could try and taunt me with it?" Harry asked. Draco shook his head.

“No, dad never sends me any letters for anything like that. You never know whose hands they could end up in,” Draco explained.

“Okay. We’re gonna have to assume the worst, that they know about us – how they know is beyond me. Just keep an eye out on things until we figure out what to do,” Harry told him. “Now, we gotta get to breakfast before someone gets suspicious that we’re both missing.” Draco nodded and Harry left the room before making his way down the hallway.

Draco left a few minutes later and went in the opposite direction to get to the Great Hall.

Harry made his way into the dining area and smiled when he saw that Hermione, Mia and Ron were sitting in their usual seat. Harry made his way over to them and sat down.

“Morning Harry!” Ron, Hermione and Mia greeted at the same time, causing Harry to laugh.

“Morning you three,” greeted Harry. “Is there anything new going on today?”

“Not that we know of,” Hermione told him without really looking in his direction. Harry nodded, not really looking at Hermione either.

Ron and Mia glanced at each other, confused to what was going on between the two of them. Harry just filled his plate up with food and started tucking in as the morning mail came.

The owls swooped down, dropping parcels and letters on the tables. A letter dropped down in front of Ginny. Percy noticed that Ginny’s eyes light up before she grabbed the letter and stuffed it out of sight without opening it. Percy couldn’t help the feelings of suspicion that coiled in his gut.

Ron had also received a letter. When he picked it up and opened it, he found a letter from his mother. He scanned it quickly and rolled his eyes.

“What’s wrong?” Mia asked.

“My mum. She’s going on again about how Harry is not safe and that he should come up to our house for the summer,” Ron muttered out. “When is she going to give that up?”

“I guess she just feels like it's her job to mother everyone,” Hermione spoke up but when she saw the furious look in Harry’s eyes, she knew that it was beginning to grate on Harry’s nerves. She reached out and placed a hand on the boy’s shoulder. “Relax Harry. She’ll have to give up sooner or later.”

“I'd prefer it if she just gave up now,” Harry bit out before he looked at Ron. “No offence but I had a mum and I don’t need anyone taking her place.” Ron shook his head, not insulted at all.

“It’s no problem mate,” Ron assured him. “I’ll write her a letter later tonight and tell her to stop fussing. I know dad wasn’t happy with her either.” Harry was about to say something when a male voice cut in.

“Sirius Black has been sighted!” Dean exclaimed as he hurried over to where Harry, Hermione, Ron and Mia were sitting and threw some papers in front of Hermione so she could read about it.

“It wasn’t far from here,” Hermione told Harry and Mia. “Sirius Black has been spotted by the local muggles. They phoned the police but because they hadn’t been told how dangerous he was, they were a little too slow. When the Ministry arrived, Black had moved on to someplace else. ‘...But we urge the public not to worry, Sirius Black will be in our custody sooner or later,’ ” Hermione recited before rolling her eyes. “At least he moved on.”

“Good thing too - I’m not having my dad caught up in jail,” Mia informed them.

“Why is everyone so convinced that he is a murderer? I mean, if he was really working with Voldemort, why keep the one person who got rid of Voldemort near him?” Seamus asked and everyone nodded in agreement.

“He's been framed. In order to clear him though we need to find the person who did it,” Harry told them.

“We have Defence Against the Dark Arts – we better head over there,” Seamus spoke up to let everyone know. They all grabbed their bags and made their way up to the third floor.

When they arrived at their classroom they discovered a wardrobe in the middle of the floor with the desks all pulled out to the edges of the room.

“Are we in the wrong room?” Mia asked as she looked at the door only to see that her suspicions were unjust; they were indeed in the correct place. Everyone placed their bags on one side of the room and congregated closer to the wardrobe only to jump back when it shook suddenly.

“What does he have in there?” Lavender whispered to Parvati, who just shrugged back. Lupin came into the classroom and smiled when he saw everybody.

“Morning class,” he greeted.

“Morning Professor Lupin,” they responded back. Lupin walked over to the front of the room.

“In this wardrobe, I have a boggart,” Lupin told them all. Too most people, it wouldn’t sound like something to be scared of, but half of the class shot Lupin terrified looks. “Boggarts like dark, enclosed spaces like this wardrobe, under a bed, in a cupboard, or under the sink. But first things first. Who can tell me what a boggart is?” Lupin asked. Hermione’s hand shot up into the air and Lupin smiled.

“Yes Miss Granger?” he asked.

“A boggart is a shapeshifter; it can take the shape of whatever it thinks will frighten us the most,” Hermione told them. Lupin nodded.

“I couldn’t have put it better myself,” Lupin praised Hermione and she glowed, causing Harry to smile slightly before he faced Lupin once more. “Although there is a bit of a problem. Have you spotted it, Harry?”

“There’s too many of us, so it wouldn’t know what to form to choose and most likely be very confused,” Harry told him and Lupin nodded.

“Yes. It’s always best to have company when you are dealing with a boggart. The charm that repels a boggart is quite simple, yet it requires force of the mind. You see; laughter is the one thing that finishes off a boggart – what you have to do is force the boggart to choose a form that you think is amusing.” He looked around the class before nodding. “The charm is riddikulus! Try it without the wands please.”

“Riddikulus!” said the class together and Lupin smiled.

“Good, now I want everyone to form a line behind Neville please,” Lupin, ordered them and everyone rushed behind Neville to get a place. “Okay Neville, step forward.” Neville stepped forward so that he was standing next to Lupin. “Okay, what frightens you the most?”

“Snape,” Neville whispered and the class laughed knowingly. Lupin laughed as well.

“Yeah, I can understand why people would be scared of him,” Lupin told him and Neville nodded. “Now, you live with your grandmother, don’t you?”

“Yeah, but I don’t want it to turn into her either,” Neville hurried out nervously, causing the teacher to smile down at the boy.

“No, you misunderstand me. Think about what your grandmother wears,” Lupin told him. Neville was about to tell him but Lupin shook his head. “Don’t tell me, just think about it very clearly in your mind. Have you got it?” Neville nodded. “Okay, wands up,” Neville and Lupin brought up their wands. “Ready?” Neville nodded.

Lupin flicked his wand and the latch on the wardrobe unlocked itself. The door slowly swung open and Snape came climbing out of the wardrobe. Lupin took a small step away from Neville. “Keep it clear in your mind,” Lupin encouraged.

Neville’s wand started to shake slightly before he managed to croak out “Riddikulus!” Snape stumbled backward before he looked down

and saw that he was dressed in a green dress and a ferret shoulder shawl, complete with a stuffed vulture hat and a red handbag.

Everyone in the class apart from the Slytherins started to crack up laughing, causing the Snape/boggart to look at them.

“Good going Neville!” Lupin praised as he moved over to the old record player and put some music on. “Next!” he shouted.

Ron hurried forward and the boggart changed into a large spider. Most of the girls started to scream at this and Ron paled before he lifted up his wand and shouted “Riddikulus!” Skates appeared on the end of each of legs, causing the spider to start sliding all over the place.

Parvati hurried over next and the boggart changed from a spider into a large cobra. Parvati stared at it for a second before she brought up her wand and shouted “Riddikulus!” The snake changed into a large jack-in-the-box.

“Next!” Lupin shouted out and Mia stepped forward and stood in front of the boggart.

The jack-in-the-box bounced once more before it again started changing its shape. Mia felt the blood drain from her face and tears fill her eyes when she saw its new form.

Sirius was lying on the ground, his blue eyes blankly staring at the ceiling while a Dementor hovered over him.

“Oh hell!” Harry groaned out. Hermione covered her mouth in shock when she saw Mia’s fear reveal itself in front of everyone. Mia just closed her eyes before she raised her wand.

“Riddikulus!” she shouted and a bright red light shot out of her wand and hit the boggart, forcing it to change into a live Sirius who was having a food fight with Harry – both of whom were laughing.

Mia felt her lips curl up into a smile before she looked away and moved to the back of the line.

Harry stepped forward and watched as the boggart changed from the food fight into several different shapes before it finally settled on one. Harry felt his smile fade from his face and shivers start to run up his spine as a Dementor glided towards him. Lupin ran in front of Harry, throwing his arms out wide.

“Here!” he shouted and the Dementor boggart changed into what seemed like a crystal ball to the others. Harry, Hermione, Mia, Draco and Ron, however, instantly knew what it was that he feared. The full moon. “Riddikulus,” Lupin said almost lazily and the full moon image turned into a punctured balloon, soaring back into the wardrobe. With a loud thud the door slammed shut, locking itself into place.

Lupin let out a sigh before he turned back to face the class. “Okay - ten points to everyone who faced the Dementors, and ten points each to Harry and Hermione for answering the questions correctly. Class dismissed.”

Everyone made their way out of the classroom and headed up to their common rooms. Everyone was discussing what they had experienced.

“I wonder why he jumped in front of you,” Ron pointed out and Harry looked at him.

“Because I can’t think of anything funny when it comes to Dementors – all I can hear is my mum’s voice,” Harry explained.

“Oh,” Ron understood. “Hey, do you want to play a game of chess?” Ron asked and Harry shook his head.

“Sorry, I have Quidditch practice,” Harry apologised as he ran up the stairs to his room to grab his broom and Quidditch outfit. He hurried out of the common room with his equipment, leaving everyone there staring after him.

Harry rushed into the Quidditch locker room and grabbed a seat next to Angelina, then watched as Wood paced the floor.

“Okay, listen up everybody. This year we need to get a move on with the Quidditch Cup. This could be our last chance to win it,” Wood told

them and Harry frowned before he placed his hand into air, causing Wood to look at him. "Yes Harry?"

"Why do you say 'our last chance'? I mean, we're still here for the next year – you could come by and watch us," Harry asked. "So, we can still win the Quidditch Cup next year, just like we have for the last two years."

"Don't worry about him, he's just paranoid," Katie assured Harry and got an insulted look from Wood.

"We have to train harder and faster this year. We'll be working in every type of weather there is," there were groans from the last order.

"Come on Wood, we are only human you know – and we do get ill," Fred complained.

"Well, you'll just have to make sure you don't get sick then!" Wood exclaimed with a manic look in his eyes.

"Okay, who let him go near the coffee again?" Harry asked, causing snickers around the room.

"I don't see you all taking this seriously!" Wood shouted, causing everyone to hold his or her hands up in denial.

"We are taking it seriously, Wood, very seriously!" Fred exclaimed.

"We have three smashing Chasers who are too fast for anyone to catch," George jumped in.

"A brilliant seeker who always catches the snitch, no matter what," Fred told them.

"And a cracking keeper who can block almost any shot."

"And, of course, us - two unbeatable beaters." Katie, Angelina, Alicia and Harry smothered their snickers while Wood just rolled his eyes.

“Speech is over! Get cracking!” Wood barked and everyone got up on their feet and rushed out of the locker room before taking their places in the air.

It was the Hogsmeade weekend. All the third years were excited because it was their first time to attend.

They each hurried down to the courtyard and handed his or her form in to McGonagall, who was standing on the steps in front of Hogwarts door. When it was Neville's turn, he started to speak to her nervously.

“Erm, Professor McGonagall...” Neville started and she smiled down at the young man.

“Don’t worry, Mr. Longbottom, your grandma owed me your permission note,” she told him and Neville let out a sigh of relief before he hurried over to join the rest of his friends.

Harry and Mia made their way over to Professor McGonagall and each handed her their form.

“I’m afraid that no one will accept your forms if Sirius signed them,” McGonagall told them as she took them in. She looked at them briefly and her eyes widened when she saw Mia’s signature on Harry’s form and vice versa. “What is this?” she asked.

“Dad somehow made us both guardians of each other; he knew that the Ministry would try and stop us from doing things if our forms had his signatures on them,” Mia explained.

“You can check the records if you don’t believe us,” Harry told her. McGonagall waved her wand and two folders came flying out of the castle to rest in her hands. She opened them and saw that Mia and Harry were right.

“You can go,” she informed them before actually letting them go. “Be careful - the ministry and Dumbledore are looking for ways to hold you,” she warned them softly. Tipping her head slightly she walked off,

leaving Harry and Mia staring after her in shock before they turned back to each other. Mia grinned.

“Looks like she made her choice,” she told Harry, who just wrapped an arm around her shoulder.

“Come on sis, Hogsmeade awaits us,” he told her and she laughed as they made their way out of Hogwarts' grounds to catch up with Hermione and Ron.

When they finally caught up Hermione hurried over to Harry and snuggled into his side. Harry wrapped an arm around her waist until they reached the carriages that were going to take them to Hogsmeade. They climbed into a carriage and sat back.

“What do you wanna do when we get there?” Ron asked.

“How about we just look around first to try and get the layout. Then if we have enough time we can do a bit of shopping and see if there is something we want to buy?” Hermione suggested.

“That’s better than just going in and out of shops – this way, we’re less likely to miss something important,” Mia agreed.

“Looks like we have a plan,” Harry told Ron, who chuckled in agreement.

The carriages soon came to a stop and let everyone out. They started to walk the rest of the way to the village but Hermione stopped before they had gone very far.

“Oh, my,” Hermione breathed out as she looked at the small town.

“Yeah, tell me about it,” Mia agreed. The town was gorgeous. There were different shops all lined up together, and people were chatting away as they entered and exited each shop. Some stopped to greet others as they passed in the street. It was a life Hermione had always wanted.

“I would love to live here,” Hermione told them and Mia grinned.

“Yeah, in a nice little cottage where you could curl up on the couch in front of the fire, wrapped up in a blanket reading your book and sipping hot chocolate with snow falling outside your window,” Mia summarised, causing Hermione to bump hips with her best friend.

“And you want a beach house so when you wake up in the morning you’ll have the sea-salt smell - and when you can’t go to sleep, you can sit on the porch in the swinging chair and just watch the waves and the moon shining off the sea,” Hermione told her. Both girls just smiled at each other, obviously impressed of how well they knew each other.

Harry and Ron shot each other amused looks before Harry turned back to the girls.

“And I know that if you two want it really bad, you’ll get it,” Harry interrupted them kindly before leading them over to the Three Broomsticks to get some drinks before they went around to scout out the shops.

They found a table and settled themselves around it. Ron got in an order of butterbeer for everyone, which they all eagerly drank into.

“Oh, this is definitely what we needed,” Mia moaned out, causing giggles from Hermione.

“Tell me about it,” Ron muttered in agreement. “Classes are more gruelling this year, I mean, Snape is really is hopping mad that he hadn’t gotten the DADA position.”

“I think it’s mostly to do with Professor Lupin – he, Dad and Uncle Sirius were best friends and from we’ve heard from Uncle Sirius that they kinda picked on Snape in school,” Harry explained.

“Not that Dad told us any details about it - he was quite vague, really,” Mia told them with puzzlement colouring her voice.

“Maybe they did something that they ended up regretting?” Ron suggested with a frown but Harry shrugged.

“We’ll probably find out sooner or later,” Harry suggested.

“What I want to know is... what is going on with Ginny?” Hermione asked. The question had been burning in her mind ever since they had met back up in the summer and she wanted an answer. Mia and Ron shot each other a look that caught Harry and Hermione’s attention. “Well?” pressed Hermione. Ron sighed.

“She has been asking us all about you over the summer,” Ron slowly admitted. “But mostly Harry.”

“What did the twins have to say about it?” Mia asked, remembering that Ron went to see the twins.

“She's been asking them questions too – again more to do with Harry – the twins thinks her attraction might be growing,” Ron told them. Harry’s eyes widened.

“You mean you think she might start stalking me?” Harry demanded, panic entering his voice. Ron shook his head.

“Nah, me and twins are pretty sure it’s not going to go that far. But what you have to realise is that Ginny grew up knowing about you and she had always had a crush on you. You saving her...” Ron trailed off and understanding dawned on Harry.

“Has just reinforced the image of me being a hero. Her hero,” Harry finished off bitterly before he shook his head and pinned a glare on Ron. “The next time she’s in danger, *you’re* rescuing her!”

“But why does she keep glaring at me?” Hermione asked curiously. Mia and Ron smiled at each other before they looked at Hermione.

“Because you’re the most important person in Harry’s life and goes to you when he needs comfort. He can trust you and know that you wouldn’t break his trust. Ginny wants to be you; she wants to be the one that Harry goes to and be the one that Harry trusts,” Mia explained.

“Yeah, Mia and I know that you trust us,” Ron jumped in, cutting off Harry’s protestation. “But answer me this, if Hermione were to give you a potion right now, would you drink it without any question?”

“Yes,” Harry told them without hesitation, causing knowing smiles from Mia and Ron.

“Harry, I gave you a potion when we were ten - you had the cold at the time - but you demanded to know what the potion was for and why you had to take it. You don’t question Hermione because you trust her so much that you willingly put your life into her hands, knowing it’s never been safer,” Mia explained. Ron looked at Hermione.

“You do the same. You’re still guarded around Mia and me, but when Harry walks into the room, you change. You know that you can be yourself around Harry and he wouldn’t judge you whatsoever. You trust him so much that you reveal your true self around him,” Ron explained before he and Mia sat back and took a sip of their butterbeer.

Harry and Hermione looked at them, stunned, as everything they said ran over and over in their heads.

“They’re right,” Harry whispered and Hermione looked up at him. “I trust you so much that I wouldn’t question anything.” Hermione reflected back to when he had asked her about the gold chain yet didn’t push it because he trusted her to come to him when she was ready.

“And I trust you so much that I can relax and be myself around you no problem,” Hermione admitted in a whisper. They looked into each other's eyes before they slowly broke away and turned back to face the others.

“Okay, enough mushy serious time, lets move on to something more light,” Ron quipped, not being able to take it all. Mia huffed her frustration out, Hermione shot him a small glare, and Harry laughed softly.

“I think the main question we should be focusing on is how are we going to clear dad’s name?” Mia asked as she leaned in to them to prevent anyone else from overhearing.

"We have to look back at the evidence," Ron told her as he also leaned in. "You say that the biggest thing that the ministry ever found of Peter's was his finger?"

"Yeah," Hermione confirmed before her eyebrows furrowed. "Wait a minute," she muttered, causing everyone to look at her. "Didn't the ministry say that Sirius killed muggles with the same blast as he supposedly killed Peter with?" Harry nodded. "Then how come the muggles were in one piece but Peter wasn't? All they had were burns from the blast."

"What, you think Peter cut his finger off to fake his own death?" Ron asked and Hermione nodded.

"It would make sense – what if he could transform himself into an animal and slip away from the scene unnoticed? What would work better? Frame Sirius for the murder of Callie, Lily and James and fake his death so that the Death Eaters wouldn't be looking for him," Hermione explained. "I doubt any of them were happy with Peter when they found out that Peter's actions were the ones that killed Voldemort in first place."

"That would make sense but dad never told us what form Peter took. We never asked because we didn't want to know anything about the man," Mia told them.

"And there is no way to contact him, so we can't find out. And there's no way we can go to Lupin with our theory yet – we need proof before we can go to anyone otherwise the Ministry will just say that Sirius has been addling our minds and that Lupin helped us because the two of them were best friends," Hermione told them.

Mia rubbed her forehead in frustration as a pressure built up behind her eyes.

"Bloody hell, I'm getting a headache," Mia exclaimed. "This is really annoying."

"Tell me about it," Ron muttered. "Hey, what did your source have to say?" Mia looked at him.

“They said that they have people looking out for Dad but so far they haven't had any luck. They're also looking for any evidence that could prove dad's innocence by looking at Death Eater activity, but the Death Eaters aren't exactly being too helpful are they?” she remarked, sarcastically.

“Why would they? What better way to put down a Potter's best friend?” Harry asked. “Besides, to admit that they knew that Sirius was a Death Eater, they'd be admitting that they were a Death Eater themselves.”

“Catch 22,” agreed Hermione. Ron just looked at Hermione, confused.

“Catch 22? How can you catch 22?” Ron asked, puzzled, causing the two girls and Harry to start laughing.

“Sorry,” Hermione choked out as she tried to calm her laughter. “Catch 22 means you are stuck between a rock and a hard place – no matter what you do, you still end up in trouble. In our situation, for example, the Death Eaters can't go to the Ministry and tell them that Sirius was a Death Eater because it means admitting that they were a Death Eater themselves. They know he isn't guilty though, so if they help the Ministry catch him then the truth might come out and help get Peter caught,” Hermione explained and Ron understood.

“Gotcha,” Ron told her while Harry and Mia finished laughing.

“Ron, mate, you need to come over to our house one summer – I would love to see your reaction to some of the stuff we have,” Harry told him and Ron grinned.

“When Sirius is cleared, I'll be the first in line at your door waiting to break it down,” Ron quipped back causing everyone to start laughing again, enjoying their day of relaxation.

Filch was waiting for them as the carriages came to a stop and let everyone out. They made their way up to the school, passing by Filch's wary eyes.

Harry, Hermione, Mia and Ron made their way into the Great Hall, laughing over something Ron was telling them. Dinner was served

and they talked to the younger kids about Hogsmeade and what they should expect when they would be able to go.

“So, you had a lot of fun then?” Ginny asked. She had taken Mia’s seat across from Harry. The black-haired girl wasn’t happy about it, but she wouldn’t bother fighting with Ginny until they had more information on what the young woman was planning.

“Yeah, we had a great time,” Harry told her before shooting Hermione a smile that had her giggling before she turned back to her food. Both of them were still feeling weird after the whole ‘friends’ thing and they were trying to get their friendship back on track.

Ginny, on the other hand, saw this and smiled to herself. With any luck, Harry would turn to her for comfort and they would finally get together.

“So, I was wondering if you would like to help me study,” Ginny asked Harry, who looked at her. Ron and Mia stopped with their forks halfway to their mouths and stared at Ginny while Hermione’s grip just tightened on her fork.

“Sorry, I think you are better off asking Hermione. She is the best student of the school, after all,” Harry informed Ginny with pride colouring his voice. Hermione couldn’t help but glow slightly at Harry’s praise.

“Yeah, but it’s Defence Against the Dark Arts. You’re the one who is getting higher grades in the class,” Ginny added in. Harry gritted his teeth.

“Look, I’m too busy at the moment, Ginny. I think you are better off asking someone else to help you with your studies,” Harry informed Ginny. She was about to open her mouth to protest when Mia jumped in.

“I can help you,” Mia told Ginny, who looked at her. “I’m third in class, so it shouldn’t be a problem for me.”

“I think it will be a little too difficult for you,” Ginny retorted and Mia smirked.

“Erm, you do remember that I’m in third year – you’re second year, so I don’t think it will be too hard for me,” Mia replied. Ginny just shot her a scathing glare.

“Never mind, I’m sure I’ll work it out myself,” Ginny informed her grumpily before she slumped down on her seat. Harry just shook his head as he finished his dinner and stood up. Hermione stood up with him.

“Let’s get back to the common room. We need to have a talk anyway,” Harry told Hermione, who nodded. Ron and Mia also got up and followed Harry out of the Great Hall.

They made their way up the stairs and saw a group of Gryffindors with students from other houses standing in front of the Gryffindor common room.

“What the hell is going on?” Hermione asked.

“Someone forgot the password?” Ron suggested.

“Even if someone did forget the password, there are other Gryffindors there so they should be able to get in,” Mia told him as they moved closer only to see that the Fat Lady was no longer in her painting, which was torn to shreds.

“Looks like someone attacked her,” Hermione told them.

“Headmaster coming through, move to the side!” a grouchy voice ordered. Everyone moved over as Dumbledore rushed up the stairs and stopped outside of the painting. He touched the rips before he turned to Filch.

“Round up the ghosts and tell them to search every painting in the castle. We must find the Fat Lady,” Dumbledore ordered him but Filch spoke up.

“I don’t think the ghosts are necessary. She’s up there,” Filch told him as he pointed to a painting a floor above.

All of the students looked at each other before running up the stairs.

“OI!” Percy shouted. “Slow down!” but none of the students took heed. Soon, they arrived at the painting that held the hiding Fat Lady.

“My dear,” Dumbledore soothed as he pushed himself to the front. Harry and Hermione were to the right of him while Ron and Mia were to the left. “Who did this to you?”

The Fat Lady peeked out from over the rock that she was hiding behind.

“Him, that man! Eyes were as black as coal! That Black, that Sirius Black!” she cried out. Everyone let out a gasp while Harry, Mia, Ron and Hermione each shared a confused look.

“Dad?” Mia asked, surprised. “Why would he want to break into the common room?”

“Maybe he was trying to get to Potter?” Pansy suggested and Mia rolled her eyes.

“Hello! Dad knows it’s Halloween and that we were going into Hogsmeade today. And why would he want to kill Harry anyway when he has plenty of chances to do it while Harry is living with us,” Mia finished with a scathing glare.

“I want everyone in the Great Hall!” Dumbledore ordered. “Mr. Weasley, I want you to find the other teachers and prefects – we must search the castle!” Percy nodded as he hurried off.

Everyone made their way to the Great Hall where they were informed that they were going to sleep in there for the night as the teachers weren’t sure if it was yet safe for the students to go back to their common rooms.

“This is just stupid. Dad wouldn’t kill anyone!” Mia ground out as she tugged at the top of her PJs. All the girls had gotten changed in the girls’ toilet with the boys changing in the boys’ toilet.

Dumbledore and other teachers had conjured up thick purple sleeping bags for everyone to sleep in.

Once everyone had settled down in their sleeping bags, many of the kids just dropped off, mostly exhausted from their day at Hogsmeade – the younger kids took a while to settle down but Madam Pomfrey had requested that they all get something hot to drink so they could relax more easily.

Harry just lay there, staring at the ceiling. It had changed itself to look like the night sky outside. There was the whirlwind galaxy and a shooting star shooting directly overhead. He couldn't help but smile as he reflected back to doing this same thing at his home.

On the roof of the house, there was a flat spot that allowed them to lie down on the roof and stare at the stars above without light from the street lamps interfering. He heard someone moving closer and he turned on his side, turning his back on the intruder.

"The ghosts haven't found anyone yet and they're still checking," Percy told Dumbledore, who nodded. "I don't see why you won't bring the Dementors in..."

"No Dementor will pass these grounds while I'm still headmaster," Dumbledore cut off Percy, who just looked at him, stunned, before he walked off. Snape turned to Dumbledore.

"Sirius Black is getting into this castle somehow," Snape told Dumbledore. "I wonder if you have thought anymore about my concerns that I expressed to you before the term started. That I thought someone might be helping Sirius into the castle."

"Yes, I have thought about it but there is no evidence to prove that accusation, Professor Snape," Dumbledore told him.

"There must be," Snape hissed. "We have to catch Black sooner or later. Otherwise Potter and his friends will get it in their head that they can clear him when Black is a traitor!"

"Professor Snape," Dumbledore hissed. Snape closed his mouth and looked back at Dumbledore. "We must allow these students to have as much peace as they can. Do not interrupt it." With that, Snape walked off and spoke to Filch for a minute before he left the Great Hall.

The other teachers followed him while Dumbledore looked over his students once more before leaving the Great Hall.

Harry looked up to see Hermione staring at him; she had obviously overheard the conversation between Snape and Dumbledore too.

Hermione was looking at Harry with concern in her eyes. “Lupin?” she mouthed to him and Harry nodded back in agreement. They had been talking about Lupin.

Harry was finding it hard to get to sleep. He could see that Mia was sleeping more peacefully – probably due to the fact that she knew that her father was alive. Ron was snoring as usual.

Hermione was a bit restless. She seemed to be tossing and turning slightly. Harry turned his head to scan the Great Hall to make sure that no one was watching before he reached over to Hermione. He placed a hand on her shoulder, causing her to look at him.

Harry opened this sleeping bag and held it open as an invitation. Hermione smiled and climbed out of her sleeping bag and into Harry’s. The sleeping bag expanded to accommodate two people before Hermione zipped it up and rested her head on the pillow while Harry wrapped an arm around her waist. Both of them were finally able to fall into a deep sleep.

Ron and Mia looked at each other with identical grins on their face. They both had woken up when they heard Hermione stop tossing and turned and watched the scene. They both slapped low fives before they went back to sleep themselves.

None of them knew that Dumbledore was watching from the doors of the Great Hall. He frowned when he saw the interactions between Harry and Hermione. He was torn between wanting to control Harry or to finally accept Harry the way he was. He sighed to himself; it looked like he needed to think some more.

McGonagall had also watched the scene with a light heart. She knew that she shouldn’t accept this kind of thing between students but she had seen how restless Miss Granger had been and how Harry’s touch seemed to calm her. She’d leave it for now.

Ginny also watched the scene with a hurting heart. She wanted to be the one who was wrapped up in Harry's arms. She wanted to be the one who was sharing his sleeping bag, but her hero wouldn't look at her thanks to *her* getting in their way. Ginny sighed to herself; it looked like she'll need to send another message.

Meanwhile, out in the grounds, a black dog sat on the same hill as he had when he first arrived there. He just watched Hogwarts with a steady eye before he slinked off to sleep, leaving Hogwarts to rest in peace.

TBC

Chapter 6: Face Off, Quidditch and Dementors

“He’s barmy!” Ron exclaimed. “He is a complete and utter loony!”

“So you’ve said,” Hermione informed him as she looked through her bag.

“Why on earth did Dumbledore give him the job?” Ron asked.

“Because the Fat Lady refuses to take the job back unless she has protection in case dad comes back to attack her,” Mia explained as they made their way down the corridor away from the portrait of Sir Cadogan – the same portrait that they had met back on their first day of classes.

“He’s a nightmare,” Harry agreed with Ron. “He changes the password so often that it’s annoying! I don’t have time to memorize several passwords each day!”

“I know but that’s the way it is. The Fat Lady refuses to come back without any protection. Dumbledore is looking for the culprit but it’s not easy as he has to keep an eye on the Dementors and look out for Sirius,” Hermione explained.

“Let’s just hope that it’s over soon and that the Fat Lady will come back,” Harry told Ron and Mia, who just grumbled in response as they walked downstairs to get their breakfast.

They all sat down at their usual tables and eagerly tucked into their food when Ginny walked over towards Harry once more.

“Good morning Harry,” greeted Ginny as she sat down on Harry’s left. Harry moved away from her and closer to Hermione. She had started looking at Harry curiously when she had caught sight of Ginny.

“Morning Ginny,” Harry replied in a neutral tone. Hermione rolled her eyes and wrapped an arm around Harry’s elbow before winking at Mia.

“Harry, you’re not cheating on me already, are you?” Hermione teased, causing Harry’s head to whip around to face her, shocked at

what was happening. Ginny just stared at Hermione like she had grown two heads. Mia and Ron shared an amused grin before they turned back to watch the show in front of them.

“Cheating?” Ginny asked, her voice frosty. Hermione just smiled sweetly and rested her head on Harry’s shoulder before she looked up at Harry through her eyelashes.

“I mean, surely you can’t be that bored of me already... especially not after last night,” she hinted. Harry just gulped as he continued to stare down at Hermione and noticed that his thoughts were starting to take him in directions they really shouldn’t go this early in the morning.

“Last night?” Ginny ground out, her thoughts racing over what could have happened the night before.

“Of course not, how can I possibly be bored with you? Last night was just wonderful,” Harry flirted back and Hermione shot him a saucy smile. She ran a hand up his chest and started fiddling with the buttons on his shirt as she bit her bottom lip, a faint blush coming over her face. She couldn’t believe what she was doing but she liked it a lot.

Harry’s hand came up and covered hers, stilling her movement. “Now, now, we ended up doing a lot of things last night because you started doing that,” Harry playfully scolded her.

Neither of them saw that Ginny had heard enough; she got up and stomped off. Ron and Mia just continued to stare at the other two before Mia rolled her eyes and threw her foot out, kicking Harry hard on the shin.

Harry jumped up in his seat, causing his knees to hit the table before he turned to pin Mia with a glare.

“Play time is over lovebirds, she’s gone,” Mia pointed out as she nodded over to the now empty seat beside Harry. Harry and Hermione separated straight away while Ron shook his head.

“There are going to be a lot of rumours flying around now. I’m interested to see which one will take it the furthest,” Ron told Mia, who started choking on her juice due to her sudden laughter.

Harry and Hermione just blushed and glared at Ron in return.

Later Harry, Hermione, Mia and Ron made their way to their Defence Against the Dark Art class. The boys were talking about something that Harry had learnt in Quidditch practice when Mia turned to Hermione to ask her a question only to find that she wasn’t there. Startled, she looked around but still didn’t see her.

“Hey,” Mia started as she turned around, walking backwards. “Where’s Hermione?” Harry and Ron looked over their shoulder only to see that Hermione wasn’t there.

“Wasn’t she just right behind us?” Harry asked, puzzled.

“Yeah,” Ron agreed before he shrugged. “Maybe she forgot something.”

“Why wouldn’t she let us know?” Mia asked as she turned back around. They entered their DADA classroom and took their seats. Mia was sitting next to Ron and Harry sat alone at the table to right of them.

Everyone finished getting ready for the lesson just before the door opened and slammed dramatically behind a stalking figure. Professor Snape walked past the rows of tables and used his wand to close all the blinds, encasing the classroom in darkness.

“As Professor Lupin has inconveniently fallen ill, I’m taking over your classes until he comes back,” Snape informed them all as he made his way over to the desk in front of the projection screen.

“What’s wrong with Professor Lupin?” Harry asked as he placed his hand in the air. Snape looked at him over his hooked nose.

“None of your business Mr. Potter,” Snape informed him and looked down at the desk at some scattered papers. “My, my, look how far behind you are,” Snape told them all in a tone that implied that he

was disgusted with it. "Fine, I want you all to turn to page 394." He walked over to the projector and tapped it. He looked over to where Ron was flipping the pages one at a time before he let out a huff of frustration and pointed his wand at Ron's books, causing it to flip right to the proper page.

Ron looked at his book in shock before he leaned over and caught what they were going to be studying.

"Werewolves?" Ron demanded.

"But sir," Hermione's voice startled them all as they turned to see her. "We're not to supposed to start on werewolves until next term."

"Where did she come from?" Ron hissed to Harry. "Did you see her come in?" Harry shook his head, indicating that he was as clueless as Ron on the issue.

"I've been here the whole time," Hermione hissed at Ron.

"Five points from Gryffindor for your outburst Miss Granger," Snape informed her. He tapped his wand on the projector once again and it came to life. "Can anyone tell me what the differences are between a werewolf and a wolf animagus?" Snape asked as he moved over to the projection screen. Hermione placed her hand into the air. "No one?"

"Please sir," Hermione started. "A wolf animagus is a human transformed into a wolf; they still keep their human traits and can choose when to change. But a werewolf is a human with no choice about when to change. Every full moon, he is forced to become a werewolf, a creature with no control. It only answers to the call of its mate."

Pansy let out a howl, causing everyone to look at her and the Slytherins to laugh. Draco just rolled his eyes in annoyance at them. He knew that some of the Slytherins just wanted to learn as much as they could, but there was a bunch of Slytherins that was determined to ruin that.

"That, Miss Granger, is the second time you have spoken out of turn," Snape replied silkily. "Are you so out of control in regards to your tongue, or do you just wish to prove yourself as an insufferable know-it-all?"

Hermione sat back in her chair as she moved her eyes down to the book. Harry could see that her eyes were beginning to well up with tears and felt his anger rising as he glared at Snape. Harry knew that Hermione's natural thirst for knowledge drew resentment from quite a few of their classmates, but he recognized her eagerness in class for what it was. Her instinctual desire to learn and a defense mechanism to keep herself from being hurt by others.

It certainly didn't give Snape a right to try and bring her down.

Harry looked to his left and saw that Ron was furious as well. When he glanced at Mia she seemed cool and collected, but when he looked to his right and saw that Draco's apparent coolness was only on the outside knew better. The whiteness of Draco's knuckles as his fingers curled around the table gave away to Harry just how angry he was.

Harry turned back to Snape and was about to say something when a cold female voice broke through and gained everyone's attention.

"Next time, don't bother asking," Mia announced coldly. Everyone stopped what they were doing and looked at her in her spot next to Ron.

"Excuse me?" Snape asked and Mia stood up with her blue eyes blazing, reflecting the fire exploding inside of her. Harry had a feeling that if Voldemort were right in front of her at that moment, he would run for a mile.

"You are the most gutless man to ever walk the Earth - after Voldemort that is. You asked if anyone knew the answer and didn't have the guts to ask Hermione when she put her hand up. When asking again she told you the answer then you dared to degrade her by calling her an insufferable know-it-all!" Mia snapped. "None of the other teachers have problems with her. In fact, they actually *like* it when she gives them answers because she shares her knowledge

with everyone. But you, on the other hand, *you* just can't handle that Hermione is the brightest witch of the age and in return, you belittle her."

"Miss Black," Snape stated but Mia had lost it.

"STOP comparing us to our parents!" Mia snapped and Snape's eyes widened in shock. "Harry is not James! I'm not my dad or my mum! Yeah, I get that Uncle James and dad used to pick on you and that they did something that you hate them for. But you have no right to channel your hate on to us – we haven't done anything wrong! Be a man and face up to your responsibilities and learn that we're not our parents!" Snape's eyes just narrowed.

"Detentions Miss Black, and thirty points off from Gryffindor," Snape snipped out and Mia arched an eyebrow.

"Are you so jealous of Professor Lupin that you would risk everything?" Mia asked and Snape looked at her before she smirked. "Oh yeah, please do remember that my father is Sirius Black." With that, she picked up her bag and left the DADA class, leaving everyone staring after her in shocked silence.

"And we thought Hermione was scary," Ron muttered as he leaned over to Harry, who fought back his snickers. Hermione glared at Ron before she looked at Harry.

"She's in for it now," Hermione told him. Harry sighed as he agreed. "Dumbledore is not going to let this go."

"I know," Harry whispered.

"Thanks to Miss Black and Miss Granger's inability to keep quiet, you all now have homework. I want two rolls of parchment on the difference between werewolves and wolf animagi," Snape informed them all over the student protests. Ignoring everything else, he turned back to the projector and started with the lesson.

Ron found himself in the Gryffindor common room, catching up on homework that needed to be handed in the next day. Harry and Hermione had gone looking for Mia off after their Defence Against the

Dark Arts class, but were just finding out that she had been dragged up to Dumbledore's office to get a lecture because Snape had decided to complain about her.

When Mia made her way into the common room, she twisted her black hair up and rubbed the back of her neck. She smiled when she saw Ron and let go of her hair.

"Well, that was eventful," Mia, told them as she flopped down on the seat. Ron looked up from where he was doing his homework on the table.

"Where have you been?" Ron asked. "Harry and Hermione have been making me crazy in their panic over you!"

"Dumbledore's office," Mia told him with a look of distaste. "Apparently Snape went running to Dumbledore, crying that I didn't do what I was told." Ron snickered at the thought of Snape crying.

"What else happened?" Ron asked and Mia let out a small laugh.

"McGonagall got involved and it ended up with a shouting match between him and her. I don't think I've ever been entertained so much," Mia told him and Ron let out a laugh.

"Man, you how long have you got detentions for?" Ron asked; Mia wrinkled her nose.

"Just two weeks. I got off lucky – Snape wanted me to have detention for the rest of the year for disparaging his character in class," Mia explained.

"Whose character?" a female voice spoke up and Mia looked up to see that Harry and Hermione were making their way into the common room. Both of them let out a sigh of relief when they saw her at the table with Ron.

"Where the hell have you been?" Harry demanded. Ron snorted out a laugh and turned back to his homework while Harry and Hermione sat down on the couch. "What's so funny?" Harry looked between Ron and Mia, confused.

“I got hauled into Dumbledore's office – Snape went running to him because of what happened in class,” Mia explained.

“Oh my, your dad is just gonna love this when he finds out,” Hermione muttered under her breath and Mia giggled, causing them to look at her.

“I think he will,” Mia told them. “Snape refuses to host detentions with me so I'm being placed with someone else,” she explained.

“This is just getting ridiculous!” Hermione exclaimed. “He issued the detentions so he should take full responsibilities for them.”

“Are you sure you're not related to McGonagall?” Mia asked as she peered at Hermione, causing Hermione to eye her warily.

“Yes, I'm pretty sure I'm not related to McGonagall... why?” Hermione asked, her tone cautious.

“Because that's exactly what McGonagall told Snape. You would think someone took away his favourite teddy bear by the way he looked at her,” Mia told her.

“What did Dumbledore say?” Harry asked, taking over the questioning since Hermione was just mouthing soundlessly at Mia's response.

“ 'Detention for two weeks Miss Black. We will get back to you when we have determined who is going to supervise you on your detentions,' ” Mia mocked and Ron sniggered.

“What's the bet everyone will be clamouring to take on Mia for detention? She told off the greasy git!” Ron exclaimed and Mia rolled her eyes while smiling at Ron.

“Oh honestly, this whole thing is ridiculous,” Hermione finally got her voice back. “And, why on earth, did you have to take the bait?”

“He insulted you,” Harry shot at her. “He's a teacher! He shouldn't be allowed to insult a student and get away with it.”

“And add in the fact I have some steam that I need to burn off,” Mia added in before shrugging. “Gotta protect you from the idiots; you’re too nice for your own good.” Hermione shot her an insulted look. “It’s true!”

“She’s right,” Ron spoke up, causing Hermione to look at him. “You tend to let people say what they want about you – you stand up when it’s Harry who’s being slagged off, but you stand down when it comes to you. So we’re taking up the slack when it comes to defending you.”

“I’m impressed. I don’t think I’ve ever heard something so insightful come out of Ronald Weasley’s mouth before,” Harry remarked and got a balled up parchment to the head.

“And that’s for the last time too,” Ron informed Harry, who just laughed.

“Are you ready for your Quidditch match?” Mia asked, once everyone had settled down. Harry nodded.

“Yeah, Wood has been crazy with the practices. Let’s just hope that we catch the snitch as soon as possible,” Harry told them as he looked out of the window and saw that the clouds were darkening. “I don’t fancy being caught out in the weather.”

Hermione shuddered at the thought of Harry being caught out there.

“Do you think they’ll postpone it?” Hermione asked almost hopefully. But her hopes were dashed when Harry shook his head.

“No, we’re already being pushed because we’re playing Hufflepuff – one of the Slytherin players came down ill and they don’t have a substitute for them. So Wood is a bit bonkers and he won’t allow anyone to change anything,” Harry explained.

“Oh that’s great,” Hermione muttered before she looked at her watch. “You’d better get a move on, otherwise you’ll be late.” Harry nodded as he ran up the stairs to get changed into his Quidditch outfit.

Everyone was sitting in the stands, huddling into each other as the wind raged and the rain poured down. Harry was having a hard time

seeing anything as he flew around the Quidditch pitch. He could hear faint cheering over the rain, but it was off in the distance as he continued his vain search for the elusive snitch. Suddenly he felt someone tugging at his arm, pulling him down to the ground.

Once they landed, Harry rubbed his glasses and saw that it was Fred was holding onto his arm as the team surrounded them.

“Okay, I called for a time out – we’re up about 50 points but if we don’t catch the snitch soon, we’ll be playing into the night,” Wood told them.

“Harry,” a female voice called out and Harry turned to see Mia hurrying her way over to him.

“Mia, can’t you do something about this weather?” Harry demanded and Mia shot him a look.

“Oh sure, I’ll go and whistle a happy song and hope that the sun will come out,” Mia shot back at him. “It doesn’t work like that! Mother Nature is pissed and I’m leaving it like that. I don’t fancy being zapped because I tried to mess with her!”

“Oh, here!” Hermione exclaimed as she grabbed Harry’s glasses, causing him to splutter as he looked around the stadium with blurry eyes. “Impervius!” she slipped the glasses back on Harry’s face and everything came back into view for him. “The spell helps to repel water,” she explained.

“Brilliant!” Harry exclaimed and Hermione blushed before she hugged Harry and kissed his cheek before hurrying her way back over to the stands.

“Catch the snitch as soon as you can - I’m not standing out here in the rain all night. Besides, the snitch will be even harder to find once it’s dark,” Mia warned. Harry nodded as he watched Mia hurry over to the stands before climbing on his broom. He shot up into the air and resumed his search for the snitch.

He soon caught sight of it and zoomed after it, urging his broom on. But the snitch took a sharp turn upward, forcing Harry to pull up hard in pursuit as it flew higher into the clouds.

Harry soon felt funny. It felt like he had gone deaf - he couldn't hear anything and a cold dread started to creep over him. He felt his heartbeat faster and finally recognised the feeling – the Dementors were near by.

“Shit!” Harry swore as he lay down on his broom, urging it faster so he could grab the snitch and get back down to the ground as soon as possible. But a black blur started down his way and Harry gulped. He swerved his broom around, trying to avoid the Dementor that was coming after him only to realise how far away he had drifted from the Quidditch pitch and that the Dementors were now surrounding him.

Harry dodged around as fast as he could but one got too close, thrusting him back into the deep recesses of his mind and Harry heard the screaming start up once more.

“Not Harry, not Harry, please not Harry!”

“Stand aside, you silly girl...stand aside, now...”

“Not Harry, please no, take me, kill me instead –” Harry felt that he was falling from his broom, hard and fast into the darkness. *“Not Harry! Please...have mercy...have mercy...”* a man's voice was laughing before a woman's scream took over everything and Harry's eyes finally rolled up into the back of his head.

Everyone below was scanning for Harry and the snitch. Mia was standing near the bottom of the stands as she searched the air for Harry, narrowing her eyes when she couldn't catch sight of him. Finally, she saw a black speck descending rapidly and felt her face go pale.

Hermione's eyes were squinted before she saw a blurred object falling from the air at high speed. Her heart stopped and clenched painfully when she saw that it was Harry.

“HARRY!” Hermione screamed as she watched as Harry fall faster and faster. Mia rushed to the ground and towards the middle of the pitch. As everyone watched as she threw up her hands and a bright white light shot out, slowing Harry before he hit the ground. Then she passed out next to him.

TBC

Chapter 7: Hospital Wing, Twins, and Hogsmeade.

Harry felt like he was drowning. As he tried to climb above the water to get some air, he found himself drifting deeper, unable to climb higher even with his struggles. There was a muffled voice somewhere far away. He couldn't make out what the voice was saying, but he knew almost instinctively that he should follow it to get up to the surface where fresh air was waiting for him.

Following the voice, it became clearer and gradually louder until he finally broke through to breathe deeply of the sweet-tasting air.

"Harry?" a female voice asked. Harry opened his eyes before groaning as the pain shot through his body. He squinted up through the bright light and saw blurry figures. "Here," the female stated as she placed something on his face. With his glasses, he could see the people around more clearly. Hermione was looking deathly pale with tears running down her cheeks in slow rivets. Ron was grimly holding a bundle, while the twins and quite a few Gryffindors surrounded Harry's bed. "How are you feeling?" Hermione asked as she sat down on the bed and took Harry's hands in hers.

"Like I fell from fifty feet," he muttered and she gave a small smile. "Where's Mia?" he asked and Hermione's smile fell as she looked over to the bed that was on the other side of Harry. He followed her gaze and saw Mia sleeping on the bed.

"She used her magic shield to stop you from hitting the ground full speed," Hermione explained and Harry rolled his eyes.

"Bet Uncle Sirius is going to love that," he muttered and Hermione grinned before her smile faded.

"I have some bad news," she admitted and Harry looked at her. "Your broom got blown off course and it hit the Whomping Willow." Harry just looked at her and Ron came forward with the bundle. He opened the cloak slightly and Harry saw pieces of an obviously broken broom.

"My broom," he whispered as he reached out for the cloak and took it into his arms.

“God, anyone would think you were holding a baby,” a female voice muttered and Harry looked over to see that Mia was awake. Everyone opened their mouths to greet her only for Mia to raise a finger to her lips. “Do you want to call Madam Pomfrey over here?” she hissed, shaking her head.

“What on earth possessed you to do what you did?” Hermione demanded in a low voice to her best friend, who looked back at her.

“Because if Dumbledore had saved Harry, he would be in debt to Dumbledore,” Mia explained.

“Gotcha,” Ron nodded his understanding. The door to the room opened quietly and everyone turned to see Madam Pomfrey coming in from her office. She stopped short when she saw everyone surrounding the two beds.

“Oh, you two are awake,” Madam Pomfrey noted aloud. She moved over to Harry first and glared down at the young man in her hospital. “I thought I told you not to come to the hospital wing because of those foul creatures,” she scolded him. Harry shot her a weak grin.

“It was the only way I could think of getting out of potions,” he told her. Madam Pomfrey just huffed, but everyone could see a slight smile on her face.

“You are one lucky young man that Miss Black managed to save you. If she hadn’t, well, I shudder to think what state you would be in right now,” she informed him and Harry nodded. “Here, I want you to take these potions, but mind you, your ribs are a bit bruised so it’ll be better if someone helped you sit up to drink them.”

“I’ll help him,” Hermione spoke up, taking over the job and Madam Pomfrey nodded in satisfaction before she moved over to Mia and waved her wand over the young female.

“Your magic levels are almost normal but I’m not happy with your stress level. It is much higher than a woman of your age should have,” Madam Pomfrey informed her. Mia nodded.

“I know...it’s just...” Madam Pomfrey patted her hand.

“Don’t worry about your father dear. If my memories serve me well, he’s gotten himself out of tighter spots than this, trust me,” the nurse told Mia, who smiled gratefully up at the nurse as she made her way back into her office.

“Lovely Quidditch match, wasn’t it?” Ron quipped, causing Harry to look at him.

“Hey, who won?” Harry asked.

“Hufflepuff,” Dean spoke up. “Cedric got the snitch before he realised that you had fallen off your broom due to the Dementors. Once he found out he went to Madam Hooch and demanded a rematch because the game wasn’t played fair. But they said it was a fairly caught snitch so they won – not that Cedric is happy mind you - I thought he was going to punch the wall.”

“Falling out of the game due to Dementors doesn’t count as a fair game to him but his team won fair and square. I didn’t even know what was happening until it was too late!” Harry exclaimed.

“Dumbledore was furious,” Hermione spoke up and Ron snorted.

“What about McGonagall? I thought she was going to hex them all right there and then!” Ron spoke up. Harry grinned.

“You know what’s she like. She likes to make sure us lions are safe and protected – not being put into the hospital wing every other second,” Harry told them, causing them to laugh while Mia rolled her eyes.

“It’s alright for you,” she grumbled. “You’re not the one who will be getting a telling off for saving your life.”

“I’m sure she’ll go easy on you,” Seamus told Mia as he moved over to her bed and sat down on the edge. “She was demanding to know how you did that anyway. I think she muttered something about extra classes and lessons.”

“Oh great,” Mia moaned as she drew the covers over her head. “Hermione hasn’t rubbed off on me *that* much!”

Everyone snickered while Hermione just rolled her eyes. While Mia was a good student overall, she didn't like homework as much as Hermione did. She much preferred to just relax and hang out than to be stuck doing homework.

"When do you think we'll be able to get out of here?" Harry asked as Hermione helped him up before grabbing the goblet that held his potion. She held it to Harry's lips and helped him drink it.

"Tonight, if you are lucky," Katie promised him. "Madam Pomfrey will probably just keep you here for a few more hours to make sure that there are no lasting effects from the Dementors."

"I hate those things," Hermione mumbled. She took the goblet away from Harry once he was finished and set it on the bedside table.

"Amen to that," Mia mumbled from where she was still hiding under the covers. She yanked them down off her head and joined the rest of the gang in watching the Hospital Wing doors swing open. McGonagall briskly walked in, her face stern.

"Are you two okay?" the teacher asked.

"I'm fine. Madam Pomfrey is a little worried about my stress levels," Mia spoke up.

"Harry will be fine in time," Hermione spoke up as she helped Harry lie back down and ran her hand through his black locks. McGonagall suppressed a smile when she saw this.

"Of course. But Miss Black, you and I need to have a little chat about you running into this situation and getting yourself knocked out," McGonagall told her. Mia looked at her, incredulous.

"I only did it the one time!" Mia protested as she sat up, resting her back against the pillow. Her head teacher just arched an eyebrow at her. "Really!"

"We still need to have a talk," McGonagall repeated and left Mia grumbling to herself as she turned to face Harry. "I spoke to Dumbledore and the Ministry – Fudge was upset about the

Dementors entering the Quidditch area. He hopes that it will make you change your mind about Sirius, so be on your guard,” she warned him before leaving the hospital wing once more with everyone staring after her.

“She’s bloody cool!” Dean, Seamus and Ron stated at the same time, causing laughter from the girls.

“That she is... but can I get out of here now?” Harry complained. Hermione just glared down at Harry.

“You fell from your broom from at least 50 feet up in the air *after* the Dementors attacked you and you’re wanting to leave already?” she demanded and Harry just smiled up at her sheepishly before giving her the puppy-dog eyes that usually caused Hermione to crumble.

Draco grumbled to himself as he made his way into the empty classroom where Hermione, Harry and Mia were waiting for him. Once he made his way in, he closed the door behind him and let his temper out on Harry.

“What is it with you?” Draco demanded to Harry. “Every game you play – it always seems to end up with you in the hospital wing!”

“You’d think he was Harry’s mum, wouldn’t you?” Mia quipped and Draco rounded on her.

“Oh, don’t you sit there and think I’m letting you off either! What on earth possessed you to use your air shield to save Harry when I could have very well made the ground softer?” Draco asked.

“Sorry, instincts took over logic,” Mia apologised. Draco threw his hands up the air.

“I give up!” he exclaimed, causing Hermione to smile sympathetically at the young blonde haired man.

“Don’t worry about it - Professor McGonagall already gave Mia a lecture,” Hermione told him and Draco turned curious grey eyes to her.

“Really?” he asked. “What did she do?”

“She makes it seem like I do it all the time,” Mia informed him despondently and Draco snorted.

“Well, you do have to admit that you’re hardly rational this year, right?” Draco asked. Mia just arched an eyebrow at her cousin, who backed right off. “Do you have any ideas on how to clear Uncle Sirius yet?”

“Nope. I mean, it’s not like we can ask the Death Eaters who was really in their ranks – they live on lying,” Harry told him. “And the only other person is Peter, but as there is no way to tell where he is, we’re kinda at a loose end here.”

“I owled my mum. She’s gonna keep an eye out for anything about Peter and see if there is anyway to get or trick someone who was in Voldemort’s ranks to prove that Sirius isn’t a death eater,” Draco told them and got nods in response.

“If only we could contact dad. It would make things easier,” Mia told them and they agreed.

“But we can’t right now. I don’t think any of our owls would be able to find him if he is moving around, and our owls can’t be gone for a long time without it appearing suspicious,” Harry told her.

Draco suddenly looked up and locked eyes with Hermione. “Hey, what is this about your cat going nuts over a rat?”

“Oh, Crookshanks keeps trying to chase Ron’s rat, Scabbers,” Hermione explained. “Ron just thinks Crookshanks has it in for Scabbers.”

“How long has Ron had Scabbers? I mean, I don’t remember seeing Ron having a pet the whole time I was here,” Draco explained.

“About twelve years now – he was Percy’s rat before he was handed down to Ron,” Harry explained and Draco nodded, frowning. Mia caught on that Draco was trying to think through something.

“What are you thinking?” Mia asked and Draco looked at him.

“Nothing... I’m probably just being paranoid,” Draco started but got snorts in return, causing him to glare them. “Fine - I just think it’s a little suspicious that a normal rat seems have a life span of twelve years – about the same length of time that Peter has been hiding. And Crookshanks – to me – looks like he might be half kneazle. That would explain why he seems so focused on Scabbers.”

Everyone looked at each other as they thought about it.

“That would make sense,” Mia told Harry and Hermione. Hermione just sighed as she ran a hand through her hair.

“Can't we have just one year of peace?” she pleaded. Harry reached over and hugged the younger girl close.

“Tell me about it. But with our lives, we’ll never be that lucky,” Draco muttered. Mia looked at her watch.

“Oh hell, we better get back to our common rooms – its nearly midnight and I don’t fancy being caught out by McGonagall,” Mia told them. She received firm agreements in return and they all walked out of the classroom. After making sure that no one else was about to spot them they went off in opposite directions.

Harry found himself out on the grounds following Lupin the next morning. He had wanted to ask Lupin about potential lessons in how to drive the Dementors away whenever they came anywhere near him.

“It’s not an easy spell,” Lupin warned as they made their way through the grassy area near the lake. “It takes patience and concentration.” Harry nodded.

“I know,” the black haired boy told him, his green eyes hard with determination. “But I can’t go through my life being affected so badly by Dementors – they’ll be more likely to side with Voldemort when he comes back and I can’t risk passing out if they're around.” Lupin nodded.

"I will give you lessons on it but not now... I have fallen ill at a very inconvenient time," Lupin told him and Harry smiled.

"I do know about your furry little problem," Harry teased, causing Lupin to stop in his tracks before he laughed.

"Sorry, a habit of mine," Lupin explained to him and Harry nodded back as they continued walking on again. "I'm sorry about your broom. Is there nothing anyone can do?" Harry shook his head.

"No, it's damaged beyond repair – Professor McGonagall says I have to find another broom," Harry explained and Lupin nodded.

"It was impressive how Mia managed to save you. I've heard it all over the school," Lupin remarked. Harry looked up at him.

"Yeah, Uncle Sirius has been teaching us how to protect ourselves. He knows that Voldemort won't stay dead for very long and he wants us to have a fighting chance when it's time to go to war with him," Harry explained before he looked back out at the lake. He smiled when he saw one of the squid's tentacles come out of the water to squirt water at the tall red-haired boy that was walking by the lake on the side across from Harry and Lupin.

"OI!" the boy shouted. Two female figures were with him. The black-haired girl was clutching her stomach in apparent laughter while the brunette was holding the other girl up and laughing herself.

"Hm, seems like the squid likes Mr. Weasley," Lupin remarked, watching the scene. Harry chuckled.

"Yeah, he does it every time Ron walks by the lake," Harry stated. Lupin nodded.

"It seems that Mia and Mr. Weasley like each other," Lupin continued. Harry looked at him before frowning.

"I wouldn't exactly get my hopes up about that," Harry told him, causing Lupin to look at him while Harry continued to stare out across the lake. "Mia is a highly temperamental girl. She needs someone who can deal with her moods. Ron tends to run in the other direction

when there is even a hint of Mia losing her temper.” Lupin smiled fondly.

“Callie was the same,” Lupin told him. “Man, she could make your uncle tongue-tied all the time.”

“What was she like?” Harry asked, curious about his aunt. Lupin looked at Harry sharply.

“Has Sirius not told you anything about her?” Lupin asked in surprise. Harry shrugged.

“He finds it hard to talk about her. From what we gathered, Aunt Callie was killed outside of the house where my parents were hiding. She was the first one that Uncle Sirius saw,” Harry explained and Lupin felt pain shoot through his heart.

He couldn’t imagine how Sirius had felt when he had seen Callie, the woman he loved so much, dead.

“Callie was sassy. She was smart when it came to classes, but she preferred to have fun rather than work,” Lupin started. “Merlin! She loved pulling pranks, especially on your father.”

“My dad?” Harry asked, surprised, and Lupin nodded.

“Oh yeah, your mum would constantly say that they were like brother and sister. They would pick on each other, fight with each other, play pranks on each other, and so on. But when it came down to it, they would stand side by side in order to face down any enemies that went anywhere near them,” Lupin recounted. “You and Mia remind me of them so much, but I don’t see you pulling as many pranks as they did.” Harry grinned.

“Hey, I have Hermione to keep me in line,” Harry replied cheekily before his smile faded as he looked towards Hermione. All three of them were under the big oak tree. Ron was lying on his stomach as he was reading – most likely a Quidditch magazine. Mia was sitting on the edge of the grass with her feet in the water while Hermione was sitting with her back against the tree with a book on her lap as she read.

“Do you want to tell me what is going on with you two?” Lupin asked, curious. He had watched Harry and Hermione ever since he had met up with them on the train. He thought that they seemed to have a bit of unnatural space between them now. He wouldn't have noticed it at all except that the distance between them - that would have been considered normal for other people - seemed somehow tense and forced between the two of them. Harry looked up at him, his expression a bit spooked, causing Lupin to smile softly. “It's alright if you don't. I gather we need to build up some sort of relationship before you could talk to me about things like that.”

“I like her,” Harry blurted out, causing Lupin to stop talking as he stared at Harry in a stunned shock. “I can't talk to Sirius because none of us know where he is. I can't tell Ron because he sometimes lets things slip when he doesn't mean to, and I don't want it getting back to Hermione. You're like an uncle to us – I feel I already know you because Uncle Sirius keeps talking about you.” Lupin nodded.

“Okay, why don't you start from the beginning?” Lupin asked as they moved down to a clearing closer to the lake. They both sat down and Harry looked down into the water.

“When I first met her on the train, I liked her. When I got to know her, I found myself crushing on her. She's smart, she's funny, and she's witty. She knows how to protect herself and cover her own back, and she can also get back the people that prank her – although I'm pretty sure a large part of that is thanks to Mia,” Lupin chuckled slightly. “Back last year, she had this crush on Lockhart,” he nodded when he saw Lupin grimace slightly. “Ginny had a crush on me, so I thought why not... if Hermione is allowed to fancy someone else, then so am I. But it didn't really work out. Hermione was jealous and kept going hot and cold. We finally talked about it before the end of term, and she explained that she was scared of this crush between us because we were only twelve and we decided that we would just wait.”

“Something happened, didn't it?” Lupin asked knowingly and Harry nodded.

"Yeah," he whispered. "When she came back up this summer, my thoughts kinda went in a different direction." Lupin frowned before it hit him and his eyes widened.

"Oh," he uttered and Harry blushed slightly. "It's nothing to worry about. Hermione is certainly an attractive girl and it's normal."

"Yeah, but we almost kissed," Harry explained and Lupin cocked his head to the side and Harry found himself laughing. "Uncle Sirius does that too." Lupin rolled his eyes.

"The curse of us being canine animals," Lupin informed him dryly. "So, what happened with the kiss?"

"Ginny interrupted us," Harry explained. "We talked about the near-kiss later that day but we both decided that we would be better off just as friends."

"Ah," Lupin understood. "And you want to be more than friends?" Harry nodded. "Did you stop to think that maybe she was doing what you did?" Harry looked at him, confusion shining in his emerald eyes. "That maybe she was agreeing to just be friends because that's what she thought you would want?"

"Really?" Harry asked, a slight shine of hope appeared in his eyes. Lupin chuckled.

"If only you could see the way she looks at you when you're not looking. But you're not going to know unless the pair of you sit down and lay everything out on the table," he warned him. Harry nodded but stayed silent. Lupin could sense that something else was bothering the young man sitting next to him. "Is there anything else troubling you?" Lupin asked and Harry chuckled bitterly.

"Ginny and Mrs. Weasley," Harry told him. Lupin sighed.

"Ah, Mrs. Weasley. One woman I feel most unfortunate to have met," Lupin sighed, causing Harry to look at him, startled. "Yes, I know Mrs. Weasley and I know her mothering all too well. Why else do you think that Bill is in Egypt and Charlie in Romania?"

"She keeps trying to mother me!" Harry burst out. "She doesn't stop to think that maybe I don't want a replacement mother - that maybe I want my real mother!" Lupin nodded in understanding. "And to top it off, she's the one who outed Sirius in the first place! It's her fault that Mia's father is on the run and Mia's running herself on empty! She keeps picking fights with Snape and Pansy, and even Dumbledore sometimes! Not that I care about Snape and Pansy but if she keeps it up, she'll find herself in a situation she won't be able to get out of."

"I heard about the argument Mia had with Snape in my classroom. Thank her for me for not breaking anything, I appreciated that," Lupin told him and Harry looked at him, startled before laughing.

"Yeah, I will," Harry, told him. "I'm just worried for her. And I know Hermione is terrified for her best friend. She told me that Mia keeps sneaking out of bed, going into the bathroom and turning on the tap to drown out her crying." Lupin sighed sadly, his heart going out for his niece.

"Even Mia has her limits," Lupin reminded Harry.

"I know. But I'm scared that she will do something she will end up regretting because she can't deal with all this stress," Harry admitted. Lupin made a note to talk to Mia in private as soon as possible. If Harry was truly worried about her, then there must be some reasonable cause for it.

"What is the problem with Ginny?" Lupin asked, diverting the conversation back to the first topic. Harry closed his eyes and took a deep breath before looking back up at Lupin.

"I never told Hermione this... Mia knows but Hermione doesn't. Do you know about the attacks that happened last year?" Lupin frowned.

"You mean the Basilisk going around and petrifying the students? I remember that Hermione was the last victim," Lupin told him and Harry nodded.

"Well, I was talking to this person I know and he gave me some ideas. At first, we thought the attacks were random but he saw that it could have been connected to me. Like Mrs. Norris being petrified because

Filch had gotten me into trouble at the beginning of the term. Colin had been attacked because he was annoying me. Justin had been attacked because he was bad-mouthed me,” Harry explained.

“But what about Hermione?” Lupin asked.

“He thought that maybe the person did it to get her out of the way. I mean, Hermione is the most important female in my life – aside from Mia - but no one would have to worry about Mia as competition - we see each other as siblings,” Harry explained. Lupin shook his head.

“What does this have to do with Ginny?” Lupin asked.

“When I went down the chamber to save her, Voldemort was there in the form of Tom Riddle. He told me that Ginny was the one who had been writing in the diary, making the attacks, and everything else. It turned out that Tom just encouraged her to attack the muggleborns – *she* was the one who picked out the victims.” Lupin’s eyes widened at the meaning of that statement.

“Oh Merlin,” Lupin moaned. “I’m guessing no one else knows about this?” Lupin asked and Harry agreed.

“Yeah, Mia knows the truth – but how can I tell Ron that his sister selected them as victims? How can I tell Hermione that she was attacked because Ginny wanted her out of the way?” Harry asked. “I told Uncle Sirius, and it’s one of the reasons that he sped up her training - because he doesn’t want to see something like that happen to her again.”

“I’m guessing things are getting worse now with Ginny?” Lupin asked. Harry bowed his head.

“Yeah, she keeps throwing Hermione these dirty glares. And every time Hermione and I are getting close to something, she jumps in and looks at me like I’m betraying her. I’ve tried making it clear that I’m not interested in her, but she doesn’t seem to get the message,” Harry told him, pain clear in his voice. “I’m just scared that she will eventually do something she won’t be able to take back.” Lupin’s jaw dropped from the implication.

"You think she might hurt Hermione," he uttered out in shock. Harry lifted his head and looked at Lupin, pain so clear in his green eyes that it was almost painful to look at them.

"I can't lose her," Harry whispered before his eyes flicked over to where Hermione was laughing at something Ron was telling her from his magazine.

Lupin didn't know what to say. He just lifted up a hand and placed it on Harry's shoulder to comfort him. They both watched silently as Mia conjured up a bucket. She dipped it into the lake and snuck up behind Ron before throwing the water all over him, causing Ron to let out another yell of shock.

The book fell from Hermione's lap as she clutched her stomach, laughing at the look in Ron's face before he got up and started to chase Mia in order to get her back. Harry couldn't help but smile at the sight.

"How can I tell any of them that they could be in danger because one girl can't comprehend that I don't like her?" Harry whispered once more.

Sometime later Harry, Mia, Hermione, and Ron made their way through the corridor on their way to their next DADA class. Lupin had yet to send Harry an owl to let him know when the Dementor-fighting lessons were going to start and he was a bit worried because there was another Quidditch match coming up soon.

As he watched Hermione chat with Mia excitedly about something she had learned in a book, he couldn't help but reflect back to the conversation he had had with Lupin. Was Lupin right? Did she really lie because she thought that he didn't want to be more than friends? Harry hadn't felt more confused about anything in his life.

Hermione turned around when she felt Harry's eyes on her and shot him a bright smile turning back to face an amused Mia. When she realized she had been caught, she blushed slightly.

Harry felt his heart jump when he saw this and realised that Lupin just might be right about Hermione's feelings after all. Hope started to

blossom in his heart but was interrupted when he felt a hand yanking him back. Frowning, he turned to see Ron holding onto his arm with a mixture of exasperation and amusement on his face.

"Mate, do watch where you're walking or you're gonna end up walking into a statue," Ron warned him and Harry felt his cheeks go warm before he turned back to the front and saw that they had arrived at the classroom.

Everyone made their way into the room and took up their usual seats. They waited until Lupin walked into their classroom and smiled at them.

"Good afternoon kids," he greeted. "So, can you tell me what happened between you all and Snape while I was off?" Everyone started shouting out what had happened, causing Lupin to lift his hands to ward off everyone's shouts. "Whoa, calm down!" he shouted.

Once the shouting and chattering had ceased, Lupin sighed with relief before he pointed to Ron. "Mr. Weasley, if you may?"

"Snape came in here and told us to start on werewolves. He wouldn't listen when we told him that we weren't anywhere near that topic yet and said was that we were way behind on classes already and gave us two rolls of parchment for homework on werewolves!" Ron exclaimed.

"Okay, you don't need to turn in the homework," Lupin told them all and everyone cheered. That is, everyone apart from Hermione, who had done the work. Harry smiled as he raised his hand, gaining Lupin's attention.

"Yes Mr. Potter?" he asked.

"I think you better take Hermione's homework... she needs to know if she would get full marks for it," Harry told him. Lupin chuckled and walked over to Hermione, who pulled out her homework and handed it to the Professor. "Although I'm pretty sure that she has all the information about werewolves there is." Hermione flushed slightly at the pride that coloured Harry's tone.

Lupin smiled as he looked at the roll of parchment and saw it was more than the two feet Snape had asked for.

"I'm sure you're right. But this should make an enjoyable read - I'll give it back to you by the next class," Lupin promised Hermione before he walked back to the front of the room. He placed the parchment in his bag before resuming his lesson from where he had left off, much to the enjoyment of everyone else.

Christmas was almost here and so was another trip for Hogsmeade, much to Hermione's relief because she hadn't gotten everyone's Christmas presents yet.

"I thought you usually have them done by now," Ron remarked to Hermione, curious to why she was still rushing about.

"Yeah, but I've been so busy this year that presents slipped my mind. I have a few of them coming via owl order, but I just need to find a couple more. Then I'll be all finished," Hermione explained to Ron, who nodded.

"Come on Ron - we'll head down to the Great Hall and see if we can grab some more breakfast," Mia teased him, who just laughed.

"Oh!" he turned to Harry. "The twins were looking for you. I think they are on the second floor."

"Thanks!" Harry told him as he and Hermione made their way up to the second floor while Ron dragged Mia off to the Great Hall. As it was a weekend, breakfasts usually last longer than it did on a weekday, much to Ron's enjoyment.

Harry and Hermione found the twins next to the out-of-order girls' toilet, the same toilet that Moaning Myrtle haunted and the same one that held the entrance to the Chamber of Secrets. Harry and Hermione shared a smile when they both thought of the Polyjuice potion that Hermione had successfully created on the first try in there as well.

"Boys," Harry greeted, formally.

“Harry,” The twins greeted back in the same tone before Hermione burst into giggles. Harry and the twins just grinned at each other, glad that they had been able to make Hermione laugh.

“So, what did you want to speak with me about?” Harry curiously asked the twins.

“We thought it was time for us to pass on something that we believe rightfully belongs to you,” Fred told him as George handed Harry a piece of parchment. Hermione’s eyebrows furrowed at the sight of the old yellowed parchment but Harry’s eyes lit up in excitement as he pulled out his wand to tap it gently.

“I solemnly swear I’m up to no good!” Harry exclaimed and lines spread out from his wand until some writing became clear.

“Messrs Moony, Wormtail, Padfoot and Prongs, Purveyors of Aids to Magical Mischief-Makers are proud to present THE MARAUDER’S MAP,” Hermione recited before she huffed. “Trust them to put everything into this instead of their grades.” Harry just shot Hermione a smile.

“Where did you guys get this? Uncle Sirius said that they lost it,” Harry told the twins.

“Well, back in our first year, when we were young, carefree and innocent,” George started but was interrupted by snickers coming from Harry and Hermione. “Okay, more innocent than we are now!”

“We had let off some Dungbombs in the corridor and for some reason that upset Filch,” Fred started.

“So he hauled us off to his office and started threatening us with the usual-”

“Detention-”

“Disembowelment-”

“And we couldn’t help noticing a drawer in one of his filing cabinets marked *Confiscated and Highly Dangerous*.”

“Oh, don’t tell me...” said Harry, starting to grin while Hermione fought the smile trying to appear on her face at the thought.

“Well, what would you have done?” George asked.

“So, George set off another Dungbomb as a diversion while I whipped open the drawer and grabbed the first thing I saw. This map,” Fred finished off, patting the map.

“You two are a nightmare,” Hermione scolded them fondly before laughing as the twins took a bow.

“We’ll take that as a compliment, my dear lady,” they both told her before they both grabbed one of her arms to plant a kiss on the back of each hand. Harry rolled his eyes while Hermione blushed and laughed at the same time.

“So, why are you giving me the map?” Harry asked curiously. The twins looked at him once more.

“Because we know the whole place by heart and because you’re Prong’s Jr. It’s time for you to take up your dad’s spot and make us all proud,” George told him.

“Now,” Fred straightened up. “Mind you two and behave yourselves.” They both walked off with Harry and Hermione looking at each other in amusement.

“Come on Harry. We better get down to the carriages - otherwise we’ll be late for Hogsmeade,” she told him, tugging on his arm. Harry wiped the map clean with a muttered ‘Mischief managed’ then stuffed it into his bag and they both hurried down the corridor.

Everyone was having fun in Hogsmeade. Harry and Hermione made their way into the pet store to get some treats for their pets while Ron and Mia made their way into Zonko’s. They were all wrapped up in heavy cloaks, hats and scarves as the snow fell heavily onto the ground, making Hogsmeade look like something out of a Christmas card.

Once they were all finished their shopping, much to Hermione's relief, they met up in the middle of the village. Ron noticed that they had a bit of time before they had to go back up to the castle.

"Wanna go to the Three Broomsticks to get something to drink?" Ron suggested, his teeth chattering. He got a round of agreement and led the way over to the building. When they stepped in, warmth waved over them, filling their veins with relief.

They found a table in the corner and sat down as Madam Rosemerta walked over to them.

"Hey kids, what you would like?" she asked.

"Can we have four butterbeers please?" Mia asked and she nodded.

"Coming right up kids," she told them as she wrote the order down. Their order tore itself off the pad and floated over to the counter, and Madam Rosemerta walked off to take another order from an adjacent table. Soon enough another waitress walked over to their table and handed them their butterbeers.

"Thank you," all four of them said politely before they dove into their glasses.

"Oh, this is life," Ron groaned out, causing Hermione and Mia to smile while Harry just chuckled.

"Yeah," Harry agreed as Hermione leaned her body against Harry's, enjoying her day.

"Has Lupin owled you yet?" Mia asked from where she was sitting with Ron. Harry nodded.

"Yeah, we're starting the lessons straight after Christmas is over. This way I'll be prepared for any more Dementor attacks that may happen," Harry told her.

"Yeah," Ron agreed before he eyed Mia. "And how are your detentions going?" Mia rolled her eyes.

“At least I have Flitwick instead of Snape. He had protested, saying that he didn’t want me for detentions. He and McGonagall actually got into an argument over it before Dumbledore intervened and said that I was to do the detentions with Flitwick,” Mia explained.

“Why did they have an argument over you?” Hermione asked, curious. Mia smirked.

“McGonagall said that I should do them with Snape because he was the one who assigned them, but Snape said that I was too troublesome to be left in his potions lab because he didn’t want to come back and find that I had done something to his precious ingredients. McGonagall lost her temper and told him not to issue me any more detentions unless he was willing to be there to supervise rather than passing me off,” Mia explained.

Harry choked on his butterbeer, laughing, while Hermione rubbed his back comfortingly.

“I can’t believe that Snape is afraid of a teen-aged girl,” Ron exclaimed, smiling at the thought.

“Well, apparently, my mum did something to Snape when they were younger and it left him pretty scared – I’m still trying to figure out what she did. Dad just laughs,” Mia admitted the reason to why Snape wouldn’t have detention with her.

“Maybe you could ask Lupin what really happened?” Hermione suggested once Harry had calmed down and wasn’t choking anymore.

“Yeah, maybe,” Mia agreed as Harry leaned back against the wall.

“Okay, from now on, I’m not drinking or eating around you lot ever again. I’ll die of choking if this keeps up,” Harry told them, causing them to chuckle in agreement.

All four of them just relaxed the rest of the day away, not knowing that things were about to take a turn for the worse.

TBC

Chapter 8: Christmas, Present, Defending.

They were making their way down to Hagrid's hut. They had received a letter from him asking them to meet him there.

"What do you reckon it's about?" Ron asked as they trudged through the snow. They were all dressed up in their heavy cloaks, hats, scarves and gloves.

"It's probably due to Buckbeak. The Ministry is more than likely to have been in contact about him by now, wouldn't they?" Hermione asked as they moved closer to the hut. Mia walked up the steps and knocked on the door.

The door creaked open and Hagrid's face came into view.

"I was wondering when you were coming up," Hagrid told them as he stepped to the side and allowed them to step into the warm interior.

"Oh, this is nice and warm," Hermione moaned in delight as she shed her jacket and winter stuff before sitting on the couch. Harry agreed and did the same before sitting next to her while Ron and Mia sat in the chairs at the large table. Hagrid sat back on his large chair.

"So, what did you call us here for?" Mia asked, curious to the letter that Hagrid had sent them. Hagrid just bowed his head, unable to say anything. Harry and Hermione shared a look and so did Ron and Mia. They all knew it meant something bad and hoped that they would know how to help him.

"What happened, Hagrid?" Harry asked.

"The Ministry owled me. They are putting Beaky on trial – Lucius Malfoy made a complaint on the behalf of the Parkinsons," Hagrid told them.

"Oh my," Hermione whispered.

"I have to go in and present my case," Hagrid told them. Mia looked at Hagrid with a serious look on her face before she made a choice.

“I’ll do it,” Mia spoke up, causing Hagrid, Hermione, Ron and Harry to look at her. “I’ll defend Buckbeak, providing Hermione helps me out with the research,” Mia announced and Hermione nodded.

“I can help you there,” Hermione promised her.

“I can’t drag you kids into this,” Hagrid told her but Mia was firm.

“You have no choice. Besides – it’s personal for me and I really want to do this. Can you please just let me try?” Mia asked. Hagrid just stared at her for a long length of time before finally nodding his consent.

“Okay, you can do the defending,” Hagrid told her and she smiled.

“Thank you,” she told him. Ron looked at his watch as it started beeping.

“We better get back up to the castle – the Dementors will be coming down soon and I’d rather not be caught out by them,” Ron told them and got agreements in return.

“We’ll come back down when we have more information. We can plan on what we are going to do. Has the Ministry set a date yet?” Mia asked. Hagrid nodded.

“Yeah, in April,” Hagrid told her and Mia smiled.

“That gives me more than enough time to get ready,” Mia told him as the kids stood up and pulled on their winter clothes before they left the hut into the cold air outside to make their way back up to the castle.

Hermione and Ron hurried up to their dormitories the second they entered their common room. They both wanted to jump into a hot shower and get warm again. Mia was about to follow Hermione when Harry snagged Mia’s elbow, bringing her back to face him.

“Mia, what’s up with you asking to defend Buckbeak?” Harry asked and Mia sighed.

"I wanted to try and find out if I could see a career in being a lawyer," she admitted to him. Harry smiled.

"You would make a brilliant lawyer," Harry told her and she looked at him, stunned. "What? Did you think I was going to laugh or something?" he asked.

"Kinda," Mia admitted and Harry rolled his eyes.

"Draco and I had a bet going. I thought you would think of a career as a lawyer, while he thought maybe a police officer – we both went with the law enforcement careers because of your desire for true justice," Harry explained.

"Nice to know what I've been gambled on," Mia grumbled to him and Harry grinned.

"Hey, you placed a bet on the girls, so we placed a bet on you," Harry retorted.

"Very funny," Mia informed him before shoving him and making her way up the stairs to her room. Harry just shook his head before he smiled and headed the other way up to his room. He had a feeling things were going to get even more interesting with the Ministry soon.

Christmas had finally arrived. Hermione, Ron, Harry and Mia had stayed at the castle for Christmas Break while Ginny, the twins and Percy had headed home. Ron had said that he wanted to stay behind because he wanted to have some peace and quiet over the holidays for once.

Harry made his way down into the common room, rubbing a hand over his hair and making it messier than usual. He was dressed in dark green bottoms and a grey t-shirt. He made his way over to the couch and smiled when he saw that Hermione was already up. She was under a couple blankets to shelter herself from the chill so early on the early winter morning.

"Happy Christmas," Harry greeted Hermione. Hermione looked up from where she was curled up on the couch watching the Christmas tree and smiled when she saw Harry.

“Hey, Happy Christmas,” greeted Hermione and Harry sat down next to her. Hermione lifted up her covers and Harry grinned as he slipped himself in next to her. He tried not to think about what he had seen once she had lifted the blankets – a pair of baby pink bottoms and strapped top with a grey kitten pictured on the front. Instead he wrapped the covers around them tighter and joined her in watching the Christmas tree.

Harry thought back to his talk with Lupin before he took his eyes off the tree to look at Hermione once more. Hermione, sensing Harry was looking at her, turned to face him and noticed the serious look on his face. “Harry?” she asked, concerned.

Harry leaned in once more and his lips almost touched hers when the sound of footsteps hurrying down the stairs reached them. Harry and Hermione froze in place as they stared at each other.

“Happy Christmas!” Mia greeted as she entered the common room. She arched an eyebrow when she saw how close Harry and Hermione were sitting together. “The mistletoe is over at the door people... if you wish to snog, at least find an excuse.” Harry and Hermione pulled away from each other and glared at Mia.

“Ha flaming ha,” Harry shot at her sarcastically as Mia rounded the couch and settled on the floor next to the tree. Hermione had to cover her smile when she saw Mia was dressed in red PJs with white snowflakes on them. Her hair was pulled up in a messy twist with a clasp holding it up.

“Well, don’t you look Christmas-sy?” Hermione teased, fondly. Mia just looked at Hermione.

“Is there a problem?” Mia teased back. Harry and Hermione just smiled as Ron came down the stairs. He was dressed in grey bottoms and a red t-shirt.

“Merry Christmas,” he greeted as he slumped on the chair next to the couch.

“I’ll play Santa!” Mia spoke up with excitement bubbling in her voice as she raked through the stack under the Christmas tree. “This is for

Ron from Harry.” She handed Ron the parcel and he opened it to see that he had gotten a new chessboard.

“All right mate, this is brilliant!” Ron exclaimed as he examined the pieces. He was truly happy with the gift since his had started to get a bit worn down from all the games that they had been playing.

“This is to Harry from me,” Mia called out as she threw a parcel at Harry, who tore into it and smiled when he held up the CD.

“Alright, the Fray!” Harry exclaimed.

“The who?” Ron asked, puzzled.

“It’s a muggle band that Harry likes – they have some really good songs. We’ll see over the summer about getting you to listen to it and see what you think,” Mia told him and Ron nodded.

“How did you get this?” Harry asked, confused to when she had gone into the muggle world.

“I got it when Hermione and I went shopping that time we were staying at dad’s house,” Mia replied as she dug under the tree again and pulled out another parcel. “This is to me from Harry.” She tore into the present only to gape when she saw it was the leather jacket that she had been admiring in one of the shops in Hogsmeade. Hermione nudged Harry’s side.

“Told you she’d like it,” she told him and Harry just smiled at her before he looked at Mia once more.

“Is it the right size?” Harry asked and Mia nodded.

“Thank you!” she exclaimed and Harry shook his head.

“I know what you are like with leather – besides, it saved me from getting a headache this time,” Harry told her. Getting presents for Mia was always a nightmare for Harry – he never knew what to get his sister because she always seemed to have everything that she wanted. Mia rolled her eyes as she pulled out another parcel.

“This is to Hermione from Ron,” Mia told them as she handed the parcel to Hermione, who took it and carefully unwrapped the present. She ignored the teasing from her friends about her delicacy before her eyes widened when she saw the title of the book inside.

“Oh my, thank you Ron,” Hermione told him and Ron shook his head.

“I told Bill that you were looking for this book, and he managed to find it for me and sent it over,” Ron told her. Hermione just smiled as she ran her hand over the covering of the Ancient Runes book. Ever since she started taking the class, she found herself fascinated with the subject but the school only had the more recent versions – the one Ron had gotten her was quite old.

“Okay: To Ron from Hermione,” Mia called out as she handed the present to him. Ron took it and tore straight into it only to grin.

“Alright, the chess master book!” he exclaimed.

“I know how much you love chess and you always seem to want some new moves. So this should be able to keep you happy for a while,” Hermione told him. Ron just sent her the okay sign while flipping through the book, stopping at a page every now and then to scan it more closely.

“This is to Hermione, from me,” Mia told them as she threw the parcel at Hermione, who took it and opened it slightly faster than her first package.

“Oh my...Mia,” Hermione gasped out as she opened the box and saw the silver necklace. It had a Moonstone Crystal hanging on the edge.

“It’s a crystal that’s related with water,” Mia explained and Hermione nodded as she smiled at Mia. “Okay, this is to me from Hermione.” She opened the present to see that Hermione had gotten her an ankle bracelet. It had the Chinese sign for wind on it. It also had the symbols for friendship, trust and love.

“I know how much you hate bracelets but this one you can wear on your ankle,” Hermione explained.

"I love it!" Mia exclaimed as she clipped the anklet on her ankle. "Okay, this is Ron's from me." She threw the parcel at Ron, who caught it deftly.

He opened it to see that it contained a watch.

"Mia..." he started but Mia got up on her knees and moved over to the ledge of the chair.

"It's a multi watch – it tells you the time, then you have the hands underneath that tells you whenever one of your family or us is in danger. It is also linked to our watches," she lifted up her own watch to show him. "So if you're in danger, we'll know it. We know how much you worry about your family so I wanted to give you some peace of mind."

"Thank you," Ron told her and Mia waved her hand.

"Don't worry – okay, this is Harry's from Ron," she handed Harry the parcel before moving over to the tree once more. Harry opened it to see it contained two books – one was filled with the different weapons that were found throughout the world and the other book contained all creatures that were connected to fire.

"Oh wow," Harry told Ron, who grinned.

"Dad helped me to find the weapons book – he's nuts about them," the girls laughed at that. "Charlie helped me to find the animal books – apparently someone he knew was an animagus that had a fire animal form. They didn't know a lot about their animagus form to begin with and used that book for research, so that book should be able to help you," Ron told him.

"Thank you," Harry told him and Ron waved it off. Meanwhile Mia dug out the last two presents under the tree.

"Okay, this is to Harry from Hermione, and Hermione's from Harry. Both of them were stuck on the branches," Mia explained as she handed them their respective gifts and sat back, eager to see what they had gotten each other.

Harry and Hermione opened their presents. Hermione let out a small gasp when she saw a small charm of a cat to go on her charm bracelet that Harry had gotten her last Christmas. He had also gotten her a silver necklace that had a sapphire crystal adorning the middle.

“Oh Harry,” she sighed as she fingered the necklace.

“It’s your birth stone,” Harry told her and Hermione smiled. “And I think you can guess what the cat is for.” Hermione laughed slightly as she watched Harry open his present. Harry saw it was large photo frame with a picture inside. It was of his first Christmas, with Sirius holding baby Harry while Lupin was sorting out the tinsel and smiling at the pair. The one thing that got him choked up was his parents; his parents were sitting next to each other as they overlooked the scene with love in their eyes.

The other thing that Hermione had gotten him was a plain silver bracelet. Underneath it on the inside was written 'Harry and Hermione –October 31st'. Harry looked up at Hermione and smiled brightly. He leaned over and kissed her cheek.

“Thank you,” he told her, hoarsely. Hermione just smiled back. Ron and Mia looked at each other with happiness shining in their eyes – it looked like Harry and Hermione were getting ever closer in admitting their feelings for each other.

Everyone was following Harry up into the boys’ dormitories to let him put his presents away when they saw that Hedwig was sitting on her perch and hooting softly at a long, thin parcel that was on Harry’s bed.

Harry, frowning, made his way over to the bed and picked it up.

“Who could have left this?” Harry asked.

“Maybe someone sent it via owl – your window is still open,” Hermione pointed out.

“Open it,” Ron encouraged. Harry looked at the parcel once more before he ripped the paper off.

“Oh...my...god,” Hermione breathed out when she saw it. Harry’s jaw just dropped with shock while Mia and Ron shared a look of amazement.

“Harry...that’s a Firebolt,” Ron uttered out in awe and Harry nodded.

“Who sent it to you?” Hermione asked. Harry looked through the papers until he found a small tag.

“Thought you might need it. Snuffles,” Harry recited as he read it off. Mia and Hermione shared a look of amazed wonder while Ron looked at Harry, confused.

“Snuffles?” Ron asked.

“Sirius,” Harry mouthed and understanding dawned on Ron as he nodded to Harry, catching on.

“Oh, this is wicked. You are going to beat everyone’s pants in Quidditch!” Ron whooped, causing laughter from Harry, Hermione and Mia.

“Looks like you don’t need to look for a new broom,” Hermione told Harry, who was beaming as he placed the broom on the bed.

“Come on, we’d better get ready – we *have* to go out there have a snowball fight!” Harry exclaimed. They all agreed and went their separate ways to get ready.

At dinnertime the four found themselves starving as they re-entered the castle. They had had their snowball fight and then explored the castle to see if anything new had popped up. They then visited Hagrid and Buckbeak and found that both of them were having a brilliant Christmas. Exchanging gifts with Hagrid had taken a little while, and now everyone was famished after the busy day.

They entered the Great Hall and saw to their surprise that there was only one table in the middle of the room. Professor Dumbledore, McGonagall, Sprout, Flitwick, Filch, Snape and two other students that had stayed behind for the holidays were already seated.

“Happy Christmas everybody! Come and sit down!” Dumbledore greeted as he waved them over to the table. “As there aren’t many of us, it seemed silly to be sitting at separate house tables.”

The four of them walked over to the table and sat down. Professor Trelawney came out of nowhere and was about to sit down when she noticed something.

“I can not sit here!” she exclaimed.

“Why ever not?” McGonagall asked in a scathing tone.

“Because there it would make thirteen at this table and that is extremely bad luck!” Trelawney told her.

“Oh do sit down!” McGonagall snipped. “I’m sure it’ll be fine!” Trelawney sat down with her eyes clenched shut as if she expected a bolt of lightning to hit the table. Harry and Ron shared a look together while Hermione just rolled her eyes. Mia, however, was too busy tucking into her dinner and asking Professor Flitwick some questions.

“Is Professor Lupin going to be joining us?” Trelawney asked Dumbledore.

“No, he is feeling a little under the weather. He will go to the kitchens if he feels hungry,” Dumbledore told her. McGonagall eyed Trelawney.

“Surely you knew that,” she asked and the divination teacher sniffed slightly.

“Of course, I just hoped that I could have been wrong. Though I’m afraid that he might not be with us for much longer,” she informed them.

“You can say that again,” Mia mumbled under her breath as she took a sip of her juice only to find that everyone was watching her. “What?” she exclaimed.

“Do you have the sight my dear?” Trelawney asked, peering at Mia through her thick glasses.

“What? No!” Mia exclaimed.

“Why did you agree with her?” Professor Flitwick asked and Mia arched an eyebrow.

“Hogwarts doesn’t really have a good track record when it comes to DADA teachers you know? One was possessed and ended the year as a pile of dust. Another one was a fraud and ended up with his memories removed. I only hope that Professor Lupin comes out of this year unscathed,” Mia told them.

“Honestly Mia,” Hermione scolded. “Start being nice.” Mia arched an eyebrow at her.

“I am being nice!” she protested only to get a snort of disbelief from Harry, whom she shot a glare at.

“Tell me,” Professor Sprout spoke up. “Lupin had told us all about your fears with the Boggarts – I had heard that you changed yours into Sirius and Mr. Potter having a food fight?” Mia grinned.

“Yeah, back when we were about eight or so – Dad did something to Harry... I think he changed Harry’s hair colour when he was sleeping?” she looked at Harry, who nodded.

“Yeah, bright pink – said it would suit my eyes,” Harry reminded her. Mia laughed as it came back to her.

“Yeah, anyway, Harry shot Dad with a spell that made him tell everyone he saw that he loved them – attracted quite a lot of attention at primary school – and our teacher thought that dad was a bit mad. Dad got his revenge by rigging a bucket above the front door and setting it up to cover Harry in honey when he walked through the door. That started a huge food fight and they both slipped up in the mess they made,” Mia finished.

McGonagall had tears of laughter in her eyes when Mia was finished.

“Your father sure did like to create pranks when he was at school – your mother on the other hand, she was quite a smart one,” McGonagall told her. The kids leaned forward, interested.

“Do you think you could tell us?” Harry asked causing startled looks from the teacher. “Aunt Callie was the first person Uncle Sirius saw when he arrived at my house back – he finds it hard to talk about her.”

“Oh my,” Sprout whispered as she held a hand to her heart. “Sirius loved Callie very much – she was the only one who could keep him on his toes.”

“Your mother was smart enough to pull pranks and not get caught. No one would actually suspect her and if people did, she was smart enough not to leave any evidence behind that would point the finger at her,” Flitwick spoke up.

“Yes, I vaguely remembered a time where an older boy had said something that Callie didn’t like. Of course, she got her revenge by sticking him to the ceiling near the Great Hall doors – quite a drafty spot, if I’m not mistaken. You should have seen Lily’s face when she came down the stairs to find the boy stripped down to his boxers, spread-eagle with the saying ‘I must respect muggleborns’ written on his chest in black ink – took a while to get that ink off, too,” Sprout told them.

Harry and Mia were laughing together while Ron was howling with laughter by now.

“What did the boy say to get her so worked up?” Hermione asked through her chortles.

“Apparently, she had said something about Lily being something – of course, no one would tell us teachers what had been said,” McGonagall told her and Hermione nodded.

“We need to get a pensive set up so you all can put some of your memories in them – we only get one viewpoint from Uncle Sirius, so it’ll be nice to see other people’s experiences of them,” Harry told them.

“That’ll be wonderful,” Flitwick squeaked with excitement. “You let me know when and I’ll be there.”

Everyone else just smiled at Flitwick's obvious excitement.

Soon dinner was over and the students found themselves walking up to their Common Room.

"You know what?" Mia started and they looked at her. "I never thought I'd say this, but that was actually quite fun."

The other three grinned in agreement at her.

"You're right. It's nice just to find out more about your family," Hermione told her as she squeezed her arm around Mia's middle, hugging her.

"Come on, let's get to bed – I'm knackered," Harry told them as he wrapped an arm around Hermione's shoulders. Ron wrapped an arm around Mia's shoulders and they made their way up to their dorm rooms, enjoying their wonderful day.

Christmas was finally over, much to everyone's annoyance – it meant classes were starting up again and that exams were getting closer. Hagrid was beginning to get pretty nervous with the case coming up, despite Mia's assurances that everything would go well.

Harry made his way into Gryffindor Common Room and looked around to see Hermione sitting at the table next to the window. A closer look told him that she was sleeping and was using one of her books as a pillow.

Harry sighed as he moved closer and sat down on the chair next to Hermione before sitting back and eyeing the younger girl. He had to admit that this was the only time he had seen her look so relaxed.

Harry jumped slightly when he felt something rub against his shin and looked down to see a furry orange cat winding his way through Harry's legs. Harry smiled.

"Hey buddy," greeted Harry as Crookshanks jumped up onto his lap and Harry scratched his ears. "I don't suppose you could tell me what's up with Hermione, could you?" Crookshanks just let out a small meow before he rubbed his head against Harry's chest. Harry

ran his hand through Crookshanks' fur before while studying Hermione's face once more.

He could see the tired lines around her eyes. The bags under her eyes were beginning to look darker than they had earlier. Harry reached out and shook Hermione's shoulder gently, causing her to bolt up in her seat. Her brown eyes looked around the room with a dazed look in them before they landed on Harry.

"Oh, Harry, what time is it?" Hermione asked through a yawn.

"Time for you to tell me what's going on," Harry told her. His eyes narrowed when he saw a red line on her cheek and realised it was from the book.

"I'm just tired due to the studying and looking for information for the case," Hermione told him as she pulled her books toward her, causing Harry to place a hand on top of hers, stilling its movement.

Hermione stared at the hand for a short moment before she brought her dark eyes up to meet his.

"You are running yourself exhausted. You are coming into classes even when I know you didn't enter them with me. You are going to all your classes somehow... I have overheard most of the teachers complimenting your work, yet I know you're not going to some of those classes because you are in my class at that time," Harry told her, his voice low and steady as he continued to stare into Hermione's eyes.

"Harry..." she started but stopped when she saw the shuttered look in his eyes and he removed his hand from hers.

"I get that you can't tell me but I'm not going to stand by and watch you do this to yourself. I care about you too much to let you." With that, Harry stood up, placing Crookshanks on the chair that he had just vacated and left the common room, leaving Hermione alone, staring after his back with a gaze that was filled with internal struggle.

Before they knew it, the date set for the court case was upon them, which set Hermione into a frenzy to sort out everything in time for

their defense. Mia had tried countless times to calm Hermione down, but in the process ended up nearly tearing her hair out. She then sent Harry in to deal with the worked-up teenager while she went off to get ready for the trial.

"Calm down Hermione," Harry soothed as he placed his hands on Hermione's to prevent them from madly flicking through the books on her normal study table.

"Harry, what are you doing?" Hermione hissed as she looked up at him with wild eyes. "I have to finish researching!" Harry pulled Hermione off the seat and led her over to the couch while she struggled to get back to her books. Harry gently sat her down on the couch and sat down across from her.

"You need to calm down," Harry told her before he reached out and cupped her cheek, forcing her to look into his eyes. "Take a deep breath and let it out, slowly," he coached. Hermione did so and soon her body relaxed, causing Harry to smile as he continued his own slow breathing to help her.

After a few minutes of breathing calmly, Hermione gave him a smile. "Better now?" Harry asked and Hermione nodded.

"Yeah, thank you," Hermione told him and Harry shook his head.

"Hey, it's no problem," Harry assured her before they turned to face the doorway when they heard the portrait open.

"Hey, I thought you guys were supposed to be leaving by now," Ron told them as he came into the common room and saw that Harry and Hermione were sitting on the couch.

"We're going to be leaving in a minute," Harry told him. "Mia needed to get changed and I had to calm Hermione down."

"Cool," Ron understood as he moved over to the chair and sat down just as footsteps came down the stairs. They turned to see Mia making her way over to the fireplace in front of the couch and chairs.

“So, how do I look?” Mia asked as she spun in a circle so that the gang could see her. She was wearing a knee-length black skirt and a white blouse with a black suit jacket over it. Her black hair was twisted and pulled up into a clip. She wore black high-heeled shoes, which added a few more inches to her height, and skin-tone tights. She also wore a pair of black-rimmed glasses over her eyes that made her blue eyes look more intimidating.

“If I’m ever up on trial, I want you to defend me,” Ron informed her. “Bloody hell, you look scary.” Mia grinned at him.

“That’s the effect I’m going for,” Mia told him.

“I gotta take a picture of this, Uncle Sirius is so going to want to see you like this,” Harry informed her before he rushed up the stairs to his bedroom. He came back down the stairs with a camera in his hand. “Strike a pose,” Harry told her.

Mia just planted her hands on her hips before rolling her eyes as Harry took a picture.

“Excellent, can you get us copies? The twins will never believe me,” Ron told Harry, who nodded.

“I’m gonna make everyone copies,” Harry promised him and Mia threw up her hands.

“Come on! We’re gonna be late if we don’t get a move on,” Mia informed them as she lead the way out of the common room. Ron stared after them with a smile before he shook his head and turned back to the fire.

The Ministry didn’t know what was going to hit them!

Hagrid, Mia, Hermione and Harry made their way over to the telephone box that visitors used to enter the Ministry. Mia picked up the phone.

“Full name and state your business,” an automatic female voice spoke up.

“Mia Black, Harry Potter, Hermione Granger and Rubeus Hagrid – Court order business,” Mia stated into the phone.

“Thank you,” the female voice spoke. There was a clattering sound and four nametags fell into the coin change slot. All four of them put theirs on. The floor beneath them started to whirl and they all found themselves being led down the chute until they finally arrived at the ministry building.

Hermione stepped forward first and found herself awestruck by the sight. The building was large with lots of people and several Aurors walking around. Mia led the way over to the counter.

“We are here for the court case of Buckbeak vs. Pansy Parkinson,” Mia informed the female behind the glass window. The female was about 25 years old just looked at Mia before scoffing and turned back to what she was doing. Mia grit her teeth as she stated again. “We are here for the court case of Buckbeak vs. Pansy Parkinson.”

“Look, I’m not here for your amusement. You are not here for anything so why don’t you go back to school where you belong, little girl,” the woman sneered. Mia’s eyes narrowed before she slammed her hand on the window, causing everyone nearby to look at her.

“Why don’t you go back to school and learn some damn manners? I’m here for the court case of Buckbeak vs. Pansy Parkinson because we were requested to come down here,” Mia informed her as she grabbed the letter and slammed it against the window for the woman to look. “And if you don’t get a move on, I will call your boss and make sure that he fires your ass out from that chair and into the gutter!”

“First floor – take the right then take the left,” the woman squeaked out. Mia straightened her outfit out and smiled sweetly at the young woman.

“Thank you,” Mia informed her before leaving the area with Hermione clinging onto Harry as he and Hagrid followed after her.

“What did her father teach her?” Hagrid whispered to Harry.

“Not to act like that, for sure,” Harry whispered back as they finally came to the room that they were supposed to be in.

They entered the room. There was a large semi-circular table taking up the end of the room with chairs arranged behind it. There were two more tables sitting across from the large table with two chairs behind each table.

Behind the smaller tables was a wooden barrier with a small gate in the middle and rows of seats going back further indicating that they had indeed come to the correct room – the court room.

Harry looked around and she saw that Lucius Malfoy and Pansy Parkinson were standing next to the table to the right with two older adults, who, Harry assumed, were the Parkinsons.

Fudge was sitting in the middle of the large table with several other people sitting in the rest of the chairs. Each of them was looking at the students confused as to why they would be there during a trial.

A muttering started up between the Ministry members, causing Lucius to look up at them before he followed their gaze towards the doors. His eyes widened when he saw the newest arrivals.

“Why are those students here?” Lucius demanded.

“I’m Miss Mia Black, and I’ll be defending Buckbeak on behalf of Professor Hagrid,” Mia informed them. She moved forward to where everyone else was and stepped through the gate, holding it open for Hagrid to follow. Harry and Hermione, meanwhile, stayed behind the barrier.

“You are just a child, there is no way you can defend anyone,” Lucius snipped out.

“Actually I can. The law says that any person can act as a defender if they have the correct material and know proper court procedures. The law makes no mention of age restrictions and effectively says I can defend Buckbeak if I wish,” Mia informed him.

Lucius just looked toward the Minister, who sighed.

"What she says is correct. Miss Black is well within her right to defend someone or something as she wishes," Fudge informed him. Lucius grumbled under his breath and sat down beside Pansy Parkinson, who was already playing up the victim for all she was worth.

Mia pointed to a seat at the empty table on the left and Hagrid nodded as he moved over and sat down once the chair expanded to fit Hagrid's height and weight. Harry and Hermione sat behind Mia's table to watch the show.

"This outta be good. The trial hasn't even started and she's already pissed off Malfoy," Harry whispered to Hermione, who stifled a smile and shot Harry an admonishing look.

"Behave," she scolded him. Harry just shot her a lop-sided grin before turning back to face the front.

Pansy's parents were in the process of sitting down in the first row of seats behind their daughter's table. They looked over towards Harry and Hermione and the male bent down to the female and muttered something in her ear. She looked closely at Hermione, up and down, and sneered in her direction.

Harry bent around Hermione to send a burning glare at the woman, causing her eyes to widen and her face to pale slightly before turning back towards the front.

Harry settled himself back in his seat and faced the front.

"Stupid purebloods," Harry muttered under his breath. Hermione just wrapped her arm around his elbow, calming him down.

"Ignore them. They'll get what's coming to them sooner or later," Hermione whispered to him before she rested her head on his shoulder.

"Welcome to the Wizarding Court. Case #23764 – Buckbeak versus Pansy Parkinson. Buckbeak the Hippogriff is on trial due to the fact that he attacked Miss Parkinson during a class lesson, unprovoked," Fudge informed everyone as he read from his file that was on the

table before him before he looked up. "Please announce yourself and your positions."

Lucius Malfoy stood up, straightened his black robes and cleared his throat.

"I'm Lucius Malfoy. I'm here to prosecute the Hippogriff for attacked this young woman, Pansy Parkinson," Pansy let out a small moan as she covered her still bandaged arm before she shot everyone a weak smile. "My intent is to prove that it is a dangerous creature and should be sent to death." He sat back down.

Mia just looked at him with a cold glare before she stood up, slowly and deliberately.

"My name is Mia Black," a few mutterings started up. "And I'd appreciate it if you didn't blame the so-called sins of my father on me," she snipped at them, ceasing the chatter as they looked at her, shocked. "I'm here to defend Buckbeak. My intent is to prove that Miss Parkinson avoided heeding clearly stated warnings and wishes to pass the blame of her lack of understanding onto an innocent creature."

"You liar!" a female voice shouted and everyone turned to see Mrs. Parkinson standing as she glared at Mia. "My daughter is the smartest student at Hogwarts!" Mia smirked.

"Sorry, I think you mean Miss Hermione Granger - considering the fact that you daughter can barely pass Potions without upending the contents on top of her," Mia informed the woman before she turned back to the front. "If Mrs. Parkinson can not keep quiet during the proceedings, I request that she should be removed from the room."

"Very well, Mrs. Parkinson, please refrain yourself from speaking out again," Fudge told the elderly woman. Mrs. Parkinson sat back down with an air of royalty. Harry leaned back into Hermione.

"Make that two people," he whispered to Hermione, who stifled a giggle as she buried her face into his shoulder.

"You may continue," Fudge motioned to them. Mia sat back down and allowed Lucius to go first, but he refused.

"Oh no, Ladies first," Lucius informed her and she snorted.

"Actually, no, I would love to hear what you have to say," Mia informed him. "Besides, you're the Pureblood - surely you're better off going first?" she buttered him up. Lucius shot her a smug smirk as he stood up. "Yeah, head first into a volcano," she muttered under her breath.

Hagrid let out a cough to muffle his laughter while Harry was biting his bottom lip and Hermione still had her face in Harry's shoulder. Mia rolled her eyes as she realized that her last statement hadn't been said quietly enough.

Lucius stepped forward; again straightening his robes as he went along, thinking it would be easy to get the conviction he wanted.

"Dear Ministry... Miss Parkinson was in her Care of Magical Creatures class when Professor Hagrid brought in a herd of Hippogriffs. Miss Parkinson had been given a book for the course but was never told how to open the book – the *Monster Book of Monsters*," Lucius lifted up the book that had a belt wrapped around it. "She had went to stroke the Hippogriff under the teacher's attention when it had viciously attacked her, leaving her with a lame arm. The damage is such that she can hardly do any work without anyone to help her." Lucius smirked as he dove in for the kill. "This creature should be put down; we can not have a dangerous creature like this on the run where it could attack more students. Professor Hagrid should be relieved of his position because of incompetence and negligence. Not only did he not give proper instruction, but did not control the creature and prevent the attack upon a young student under his care." He sat back down while Pansy looked mighty pleased with herself. Both of them were convinced that they were going to win.

"Buckbeak isn't a dangerous creature," Mia spoke as she stood up. She looked dangerous herself in her professional suit and high heels. "Professor Hagrid stated very clearly that you couldn't insult a hippogriff because they are very proud creatures. Even if Miss

Parkinson couldn't understand him, she could have read it in the book that was issued on the course book list we get every summer. She insulted Buckbeak, knowing that he would take offence to her action and would act defensively out against that action."

"She said she didn't know and the teacher should have announced it very clearly," Lucius told her.

"Why didn't she know?" Mia asked. "Did she not read the book that she was told to collect over the summer? She had plenty of time to read the book and gain the required information. The professor made it very clear at the beginning of the lesson. He said, and I quote, 'The one thing you must never do is insult a hippogriff - it may be the last thing you ever do'. If that's not clear enough, then I don't know what is."

"Look like she's good," Harry whispered and Hermione nodded.

"She couldn't read the book as she had no instructions on how to open it safely. And, by his quote, you just said that the professor knew that hippogriffs are dangerous animals yet still brought them into the school. All while knowing that they could attack any students whenever they felt like it!" Lucius argued heatedly.

"She could have gotten information on how to open the book if she had just asked shop keeper. If you like, I can supply you a list of witnesses who did ask the shopkeeper who supplied the books on how to open it properly. Miss Parkinson neglected to do that," Mia informed him. "And I didn't say that Hippogriffs are dangerous animals and neither did Professor Hagrid. He just merely informed the students that you have to be careful. It's the same with any creature out there in the world - they can turn on you if you treat them the wrong way. Professor Hagrid merely brought in animals that were instrumental in the course that he was to teach us. Professor Dumbledore and the Ministry had no problem in letting Professor Hagrid bringing in Hippogriffs to show to the class before the accident."

"He's running out of arguments," Hermione whispered to Harry, who shook his head.

“Mia will still lose. Malfoy doesn’t like it when things don’t go his way, and he’ll bribe the jury,” Harry told her. He knew that Mia knew it, too. But he also knew that Mia just wanted to have the upper hand on Malfoy. They could figure out another way to save Buckbeak later. There was no way in hell they were going to let an innocent animal be sent down due to the greed of another student.

“Your honour, if this creature was to live, he would attack another student. This time we were lucky that only an injury was the result. What happens if the next attack results in death?” Lucius asked. He knew he was running out of arguments, but he refused to let a half blood get the best of him.

“Your honour, that is merely theoretical. Unless Mr. Malfoy has been hiding the ability to see into the future, you have no proof that Buckbeak would ever become dangerous. Ever since the attack, Buckbeak continued to be surrounded by students and not one of them has been attacked. Miss Parkinson is the only victim, and she insulted the hippogriff to his face. Do you not find that curious?” she told him.

“Miss Black, it only needs to take one attack for the worst to happen,” Fudge informed her and Mia’s temper started to boil.

“Oh hell,” Harry muttered. “Now he’s done it.” Hermione looked at him, confused.

“Harry?” she asked and Harry leaned into her so that no one else could overhear what he was going to tell her.

“Voldemort had been rising in power since our parents were in Hogwarts. He had been attacking more and more for years – Fudge saying it only needs to take one attack for ‘the worst to happen’ is being hypocritical considering the fact that the Ministry didn’t do a damn thing to stop Voldemort on his first rise to power,” Harry explained and Hermione closed her eyes.

“And now Mia is pissed,” she whispered, finally understanding what was happening and Harry nodded.

“Miss Parkinson insulted the hippogriff to his face – after a severe warning from the teacher himself that it was not a good thing to do. She neglected to read the book that was issued to her so she could learn what was coming into class with a poor excuse that she didn’t know how to open the book when countless of other students had no problems asking the shopkeeper for the answer. She went straight to the hospital wing and Madam Pomfrey fixed her arm up right away yet she keeps up the pretence that her arm is still in pain. I know students have gone to her with more serious injuries only to walk away the next day perfectly fine and at 100 percent,” Mia informed him. “Lucius Malfoy is associating himself with a family who made themselves very clear that they back Voldemort – the same person who Lucius Malfoy claims he was placed under the Imperious Curse. Yet he’s here helping the family prosecute an innocent creature.” She slammed her notes down onto the table. “And you have the gall to sit there and tell me that it only takes one provoked attack for you all to take action when you all did nothing when Voldemort was running about loose killing muggleborns and purebloods who dared to stand up to him?”

“Miss Black,” Fudge started but Mia was on a roll.

“You are willing to let an innocent creature get sent down for defending himself when he was insulted? I’m pretty sure if I was to insult you the same way Miss Parkinson insulted Buckbeak that you would probably try and attack me,” Mia informed him. “If you let an innocent creature get sent down because you are too blinded by your own greed and bribes, then you are not worth the ground that Buckbeak walks on.” With that, she sat down next to Hagrid, who just stared at her in shock at what she had just done. Harry and Hermione stared at each other open-mouthed while they stared in disbelief at Mia.

Pansy and Lucius were also staring at Mia and Pansy stared fixedly straight ahead; she had a feeling that she was going to be facing the rest of her school years in hell.

“Well...I...Miss Black...” Fudge stammered.

"No more questions your honour," Mia informed him. Fudge turned to Lucius, who just shook his head, indicating that he had nothing else to say.

"We, the committee, will retire to our chambers where we will discuss the case. You may return back to your schools or homes and you will be contacted about the action that will be taken," Fudge informed them as he stood up with the rest of the committee.

Mia packed up her notes and placed them in her bag before she and Hagrid made their way over to Harry and Hermione.

They left the courtroom and spilled into the hall.

"Bloody hell Mia," Harry finally spoke up, saying the first words that came to his brain. Hermione agreed with her eyes wide.

"I lost my temper," Mia told them with a sigh. "We'll be lucky if they even listened to me."

"Don't worry about it," Hagrid told her. "You did a good job, and it was about time someone told the Ministry what they really thought about them." Mia just smiled up at Hagrid as Pansy and Lucius walked out with Pansy's parents behind them.

"I'll just be a minute," Mia told them before she hurried over to Pansy. Pansy stopped warily and watched her parents and Lucius continue their way over to the elevator almost longingly. "I just wanted to let you know to watch your back from now on. You have pushed me to the limit and I will not be showing any mercy," Mia told her with a sweet smile, making everyone think it was a pleasant conversation. "Enjoy the rest of your night."

Mia turned on her heels and walked back over to the gang. "Let's go back to Hogwarts. I have a feeling we all need some sleep," Mia told them. They nodded as they hurried to leave the Ministry altogether, eager to depart.

Harry couldn't wait to get a hold of Ron and Draco to tell them what he had just witnessed. He wished that he had a pensieve so that he could show Sirius when they finally met back up again.

TBC

Chapter 9: Quidditch, Trouble and Concerns.

Harry was flying high as he searched the air for the ever-elusive snitch. The rest of the Gryffindor team had scored enough points and it was time for Harry to catch the snitch. Now if only he could find it.

Harry turned slightly to look at Cho Chang, the opposing Seeker. She was a year older than him and had black hair and brown eyes. She was trailing him while trying to catch the snitch but Harry's new broom was faster so he wasn't too worried about her strategy unless she spotted it before him. While looking down in his search, something distracted him.

"Oh my!" Cho gasped out as they saw two Dementors gliding towards the pitch. Harry immediately thought up a happy memory of previously winning the Quidditch cup, grabbed his wand, and pointed it towards the ground.

Yes, Professor Lupin had gotten back to him about their lessons.

"Expecto Patronum!" Harry shouted and a bright light shot out of his wand and hit the two Dementors just as Harry shot his hand out and grabbed the snitch, ending the game.

Everyone on the Gryffindor stands cheered and hurried down to the pitch, wanting to congratulate the team for winning another game.

Harry waved the hand clutching the snitch proudly and his teammates hugged him in congratulations before they finally let him go. Harry watched as Hermione hurried over. She had seen him cast the spell along with its aftermath and wanted to show him the results.

"I did it!" Harry exclaimed and Hermione grinned.

"Yeah you did, but it wasn't quite what you expected," Hermione told him as she grabbed his hand and yanked him over to where he had sent the spell over to the Dementors.

Harry came to a stop and noticed that the black robes seemed to be struggling. He frowned at this and grew even more puzzled when a head started to pop out of the cloaks. When he saw that it was Pansy,

however, he fought to hide a smile of amusement. It turned out that there were four Slytherin students in the cloaks, all intent on sabotaging the game.

“Unworthy trick!” McGonagall shouted at the students. “50 points from Slytherin and detentions for trying to sabotage Gryffindor’s seeker. Just you wait until Dumbledore hears about this.” She looked up to see Dumbledore walking towards them. “Ah, here he comes now.”

Harry couldn’t help but laugh as he shared a glance with Hermione.

“They thought by dressing up as Dementors that they would cause me to fall off my broom?” he asked and Hermione shot him an amused look.

“Yeah, *plus* they would have won the Quidditch cup if Cho had gotten the snitch,” Hermione explained and Harry shook his head.

“That was a stupid idea,” Harry told her. Hermione just laughed as she grabbed Harry’s hand and led him over to the rest of the team and their housemates, where the entire group proceeded to Gryffindor’s common room to have a celebration.

Harry was in the boy’s dormitory later that night searching under his bed for his broom servicing kit when he heard someone coming into the room. He looked and saw Ron’s familiar trainers walking by.

“Hey Ron, have you seen my broom cleaning kit that Hermione got me for my birthday? I swore I put it under my bed.” Harry told him.

“It’s in your trunk – you placed it there because Crookshanks kept rubbing against it every time he came in here,” Ron replied. Harry rolled his eyes as he remembered.

“Thanks,” Harry told him as he came back out from under the bed. Ron was sitting on his bed and looked a little puzzled. “What’s wrong?” Harry got himself off the floor and sat down on the top of his own bed, facing his best friend.

“Scabbers is gone,” Ron, told them.

“What do you mean?” Harry asked, confused.

“I can’t find him anywhere. He’s gone,” Ron explained and Harry sighed.

“Come on, we’ll ask the girls if they’ve seen him,” Harry consoled him and they made their way down to the common room. Hermione was stretched out on the couch with Mia sitting sideways beside her as she flipped through the pages of her book. Hermione, on the other hand, was so engrossed in her own book that she didn’t notice anyone walking near her.

“Hey guys,” Mia greeted and Harry nodded back.

“Hey, have you seen Scabbers? Ron’s lost him,” Harry told her. Mia frowned before she shook her head.

“No, sorry – besides, yours is not the only pet that has gone missing,” Mia told them. “Crookshanks seems to have taken a vacation.”

“Great,” Ron muttered. “I’m gonna go see if anyone else has seen Scabbers.”

“I’ll come with you,” Mia told him. “This way I can check to see if anyone has found anything yet to help my dad.” She stood up and they both left the common room, all unnoticed by Hermione.

“Hermione,” Harry called out and Hermione turned her dazed eyes towards him before she shook her head, bringing her back to reality. Harry couldn’t help but smile at how cute he thought she seemed at that moment.

“Yeah, Harry?” she asked, once she was sufficiently focused.

“When was the last time you saw Crookshanks?” Harry asked and Hermione paused a bit to think about it.

“Yesterday morning. I was assuming that he had found somewhere else to amuse himself,” Hermione told him as she lifted her feet to give Harry space to sit down before placing her feet back on his lap. Harry looked down at his lap and bit back a smile when he saw that

she had painted her toenails a baby pink colour before he looked back up at Hermione.

“Have you already gotten bored with your birthday present from me?” Harry teased and Hermione’s head snapped up with a worried look only to glare at him when she saw that he was teasing.

“Very funny,” she scolded him. “He’s a cat. You don’t need to keep them on a leash – besides, I’m sure he’s still coming back for meals because his bowl is always empty in the morning after I fill them each night.” Harry nodded, grateful that Crookshanks was still alive. None of the other girls in Gryffindor had cats, so it meant Crookshanks had to be the one eating the food out of the bowl.

“I’m sure he will, just make sure you have him back before the end of term- I don’t fancy hunting around the whole castle for Crookshanks,” Harry told her. She gently hit his leg with her feet, causing him to laugh as he rested the back of his head on the top of the couch while keeping his eyes focused on her smile.

“What?” Hermione asked, curious to what he was looking at and Harry shook his head.

“Nothing, I just haven’t seen you this relaxed in ages,” Harry told her and she laughed.

“Yeah, sorry about that. Today I scheduled some time off from studying, so I’m catching up on my leisure reading,” she told him. Harry nodded and closed his eyes and drifted away listening to Hermione mumble softly under her voice as she continued to read the book that she had in front of her. He couldn’t believe how peaceful it could be just listening to her like this.

A few days later, Harry made his way into the library, looking for Hermione. He made his way over to the back of the library and saw her hunched over one of her favourite tables, scribbling frantically on some parchment. Harry arched his eyebrows before he rounded the table and sat down across from Hermione.

“Hermione...” Harry started but Hermione looked up at him with a wild and panicked look in her eyes, scaring him.

“Sorry, but I’m too busy to talk to you Harry,” Hermione told him monotonically before she turned back to her work.

“Do you think you could take a small break?” Harry suggested only getting a quick negative headshake in return.

“I have to do this first!” Hermione exclaimed as she worked through her parchments. Harry couldn’t help but watch in morbid fascination at how fast Hermione was working – she was alternating between studying and taking notes at a scary pace.

“Don’t you think you should take a break?” Harry asked.

“No time,” Hermione replied as she shifted papers and books aside, looking for something. Harry couldn’t help but be worried about what was going on with his friend.

“Hermione, you are taking on way too much – you need to have a break every now and then,” Harry told her but Hermione shook her head.

“I’ll get lunch later,” Hermione told him absently as she brushed her hair out of her face. It was the last straw for Harry and he stood up.

“Come on, we’re taking a break,” Harry told her as he grabbed her hands and pulled her up from the table. He grabbed his wand and placed a concealment charm on Hermione’s stuff before dragging her out of the library.

“Harry, I don’t have time for this!” Hermione exclaimed but Harry just continued to drag her out of the castle without stopping or slowing.

When they reached the lake and Harry planted Hermione down on the ground and sat down next to her.

“You’re going to take a break and I’m going to make sure that you do it properly,” Harry informed her. Hermione just huffed as she leaned back against the tree and looked off toward the lake. When Harry turned to the lake, Hermione finally let slip a small smile.

They just relaxed in the sunshine, forgetting that the world outside existed. Hermione leaned over and rested her head on Harry's shoulder, causing Harry to wrap an arm around her shoulders to hold her close.

Later Mia was making her way into the library. She looked around for a short while before she walked over to Madam Pince. It was time for their last class of the day but no one could find Hermione. Harry had told them of how he had had to literally drag Hermione away from the library earlier, but he hadn't seen her since and assumed that she had headed back to the library. Mia had volunteered to go and drag her away once again.

"Hey Madam Pince," Mia greeted and the librarian looked down at Mia.

"Good afternoon Mia, how can I help you?" she asked.

"Have you seen Hermione? We have class and none of us can find her," Mia explained and the librarian smiled.

"She's at the back at her usual table," Madam Pince informed and Mia gave her a smile of thanks before she headed into the back of the library, looking at all the tables that she passed until she saw a familiar body of bushy hair sitting at the table, bent over, scribbling madly.

"Hermione," Mia called out. Hermione looked over at her shoulder and located Mia.

"Sorry Mia, but I'm busy," Hermione told her. Mia shook her head as she packed up Hermione's bag. The last book to be packed was one that Hermione was struggling to hold onto, resulting in a tug-of-war to determine holding rights to the book. Mia won the fight and shoved it into Hermione's bag before zipping it up.

"We have Divination," Mia told her as she took Hermione's arm and dragged her up to class. "You can't miss class."

"Oh," Hermione groaned. "I don't want to hear about how Harry is going to die because of a stupid grim."

"I know you don't sweetie, but it's still a class and you can't lose your 'perfect student' reputation," Mia reminded as she slipped her arm through Hermione's and they both left the library together.

Neither of them saw someone watching them as they walked off.

As everyone settled themselves in their classroom and around their tables are they waited for their teacher to come out and get a start on their lesson – thankfully, for them, it was their last class of their day.

"Students, welcome," Trelawney, told them all as she came into view from seemingly nowhere once again. Mia just placed her head on her arms, which were crossed on the table. Ron propped his cheek on one hand while Harry rolled his eyes. Hermione was flipping through a book as Trelawney moved closer to them. "Today, we are going to start on seeing crystals."

"Whoo hoo," Mia mumbled under her breath as Trelawney moved still closer.

"So open your inner eyes and broaden your mind – cast yourself into the crystal and see what the future hold for you!"

Hermione and Mia were sharing a crystal ball together. Hermione started to mutter under her breath about how she could be catching up on her *useful* work and that it could certainly use her attention more than this class.

"What is up with you?" Ron whispered to Hermione only to get a hard enough glare in return to make Ron place his hand in the air to indicate his sudden desire for peace. He turned back to Harry, who was stifling a smile before he leaned in.

"You see anything?" Harry asked and Ron nodded.

"Yeah, someone spilled their candle on the table," Ron told him as he pointed to the burnt spot on the other side of the ball, causing Harry to snort with laughter as Trelawney moved over to them.

"Are you in your crystal, young man?" Trelawney asked, putting her face quite close to Ron, startling him.

"I guess," Ron told Trelawney while shooting Harry a confused look. Harry just shrugged back as Trelawney looked at Harry.

"What about you?" she asked. "What can you see?" she asked. Harry leaned into the crystal ball once more.

"Something dark," Harry told her and Trelawney covered her mouth as sadness filled her eyes.

"Oh my," she whispered. Harry barely refrained from rolling his eyes. "Is there anything else?" Hermione jumped in.

"Can I?" Hermione asked, causing Trelawney to look at her. "The Grim, possibly?" Trelawney's lips pinched together, making her look like a blowfish.

"Every since you stepped into my class, I've noticed that you didn't have the correct aura around you, my dear," Trelawney told her as she took Hermione's hand. "Your hands tell me that you will grow up to be a bitter spinster woman because your soul is as dry and dusty as the pages of the books you like to absorb yourself in."

"Excuse me," Hermione told her as she yanked her hand out of Trelawney's. She stood up just as abruptly, taking her bag with her. She then swung her bag over her shoulder, knocking the crystal ball that until that moment had been sitting in the middle of their table off its perch and roll off the table on the other side. Hermione made her way over to the trapdoor, kicked it open and left the class without looking back.

Harry just stared after Hermione; she had finally cracked. Everything must have finally unhinged her because there was no way that Hermione Jane Granger would walk out of class.

Mia, on the other hand, just smirked. She had listened to Hermione complain about this class and its teacher. She wasn't surprised that Hermione had finally had enough and stormed out of class.

"Bloody hell!" Ron exclaimed as he stared at the trapdoor with wide eyes. Everyone else was sitting still in apparent shock while Trelawney turned to Harry's table.

“Was it something I said?” she asked.

Three weeks later Hermione's abrupt departure from Divination was turning into some kind of Hogwarts legend. Rumours around the school after the incident made most of her classmates scared to go anywhere near her since that time due to her performance and now consistently frayed temper. Because she has been holed up in the library, though, many found it easy enough to avoid her anyway.

Harry had been frustrated with his lack of real progress in finding out what was going on with Hermione. He had an idea of what was up with her but he needed to get more evidence before he could confront her or anyone else with his suspicions. It certainly didn't help that Wood had been antsy about the last Quidditch match against Slytherin that was coming up. He had been calling extra practices recently to make sure that the team was ready for anything. It seemed that the attempt by Slytherin to sabotage Gryffindor's match against Ravenclaw had Wood sweating at night because at each of those extra practices Wood asked Harry if he had perfected his Patronus spell.

Harry was flying around the pitch, determined to get to the Snitch first. The Gryffindor team was finally playing its game against Slytherin. It was their last match of the year and due to their team's lead it was time to grab the snitch for the Cup. He had already spent the first 20 minutes of the match futilely searching for the elusive object when he caught a flash of golden light some distance ahead.

Harry shot after it with his broom, laying down flat against the handle and urging it faster. Malfoy was chasing after him as they both fought to get to the snitch first. Harry was getting closer now stretched his arm out in anticipation of the catch.

“GO HARRY!” Hermione shouted when she saw that Harry was getting within range of the snitch. “GO! GO! GO! GO!”

Harry's hand clenched tight around the snitch and he pulled off the dive and flew down to the middle of the Quidditch pitch. He lifted his hand into the air, showing everyone that he had finished the game.

“YES!” everyone - apart from Slytherin - screamed in joy. Harry could see that Hermione was clapping and cheering enthusiastically. Mia was looking at Hermione with an amused smirk before she looked down at Harry and gave him thumbs up. Ron was whooping. McGonagall was wiping her eyes filled with tears while smiling.

Harry felt himself get enveloped in a huge group hug from the entire team in celebration.

“WE WON, WE WON!” the Gryffindor stands shouted over and over again, causing Mia to plug her fingers into her ears to block the sound off. But she had to smile when she saw Hermione jumping on her seat screaming like mad. Ron was right beside Mia, laughing at everyone’s antics.

The rush down to the ground from the stands continued as Dumbledore made his own way over to the pitch before he sent sparks into the sky to call for silence. A gradual hush fell over the stadium and soon all were looking towards Dumbledore.

“The winner of the Quidditch Cup is Gryffindor!” Dumbledore announced as he handed Harry the cup.

Harry took the cup and thrust it high into the air. The twins lifted Harry up on their shoulders and everyone cheered once more. They had won the Quidditch cup.

Once they let Harry down, Harry made his way over to McGonagall and smiled up at her.

“Here you go Professor,” Harry told her as he handed her the cup. “You earned it as much as we did.” McGonagall smiled down at Harry as she took the cup into her hands. Harry felt himself get bombarded by a hard hug and laughed when he saw it was Hermione. He wrapped his arms around her waist and spun her in a circle before putting her back down.

“You won!” Hermione exclaimed with excitement shining brightly in her eyes. Harry smiled down at her before he hugged her closely once more.

"And it was thanks to you," Harry whispered into her ear. Hermione just smiled brilliantly at him before they pulled apart and saw that everyone was looking at them. "What?" Harry asked self-consciously.

Everyone just muttered as they turned away.

"WE WON!" Seamus shouted once more, causing everyone else to jump back in with chants of victory. Harry and Hermione smiled at them all, confused at what had just happened.

Before they knew it the term was nearly over and exams were on top of them. While Ron was moaning that he hadn't had enough time to study, Harry and Mia were calm because they had faced more difficult tests in the past. Hermione, on the other hand, was continuing her hectic study schedule, running back and forth between different subjects in some kind of scholastic frenzy.

"This is crazy," Ron muttered as he came out of their Transfiguration class exam. Harry, Mia and Ron only had one more class to go to, while Hermione had another two after that. Their exams had even harder than they would have imagined because the teachers had spent much of their time doing nothing but breathing down their necks.

"It's alright for you - you only have one more exam, and it doesn't require any thought whatsoever," Hermione snipped before she walked off, leaving the three of them alone.

"We need to find out what the hell is going on with her because if it's just her time of month, it has been a very long month," Mia told Harry, who just sighed.

"I have a feeling that I know what's going on with her but I want to talk to her about it first before I say anything," Harry told them and got nods in return.

"Come on, let's head up to Divination and get this over and done with," Ron, told them as they made their way over to the north tower.

Harry was sitting on the floor next to the ladder leading up to the trapdoor as he waited to be called. The students were being called one-by-one to take a personal test with Trelawney.

Ron and Mia had already been up and left the area wanting to get away from the area as fast as possible.

"Harry Potter," the female voice called out. Harry just raised his eyes heavenward and started up the ladder.

"My last exam, thank Merlin," Harry muttered to himself. When he arrived in the classroom he moved over to the table where the exam was obviously going to take place - Trelawney was sitting there in front of a crystal ball.

"Good day dear... take a look into the orb and tell me what you see," she informed him as Harry sat down on the chair opposite of her.

Harry looked into the orb and decided to make something up rather than sit there for ages without seeing anything.

"There's a dark shape in the middle of the ball," Harry told her.

"Yes? What does it look like to you?" Trelawney asked eagerly.

"A hippogriff," Harry told her and Trelawney sighed.

"You are seeing the future for your friend, Hagrid," she informed him. "Does it have its head?"

"Yes, it's flying away," Harry, told her and Trelawney looked at him before she sighed.

"Well, we'll leave it there for now. I'm sure you did your best," she informed him and he nodded as he picked up his bag and stood up. He was about to leave when something stopped him.

"It will happen tonight." A loud harsh voice spoke behind him, causing Harry to spin around and see Trelawney had gone rigid with her eyes unfocused. *"The Dark Lord lies alone and friendless, abandoned by his followers. His servant has been chained these twelve years. Tonight, before midnight, the servant will break free and set out to rejoin his master. The Dark Lord will rise again with his servant's aid, greater and more terrible than ever before. Tonight...before midnight...the servant...will set out...to rejoin...his master..."* Her

head suddenly fell forward then snapped back up. Her eyes were clear as she looked at Harry with a concerned look on her face.

“Oh, sorry, I fell asleep,” she told him. “Are you okay dear?” Harry nodded, shakily.

“Yeah, I’m fine,” he told her before he hurried out of the classroom and sought out his best friends.

He hurried into the Common Room and saw them. “You’re not gonna believe this,” Harry told them, causing them to look at him, concerned.

“What is it, Harry?” Hermione asked.

“Trelawney did a prediction – she told me that Voldemort’s,” Ron grimaced at that. “Servant is going to go back to him before midnight and that Voldemort will rise once more but only this time, greater and more terrible than before,” Harry told them.

“Shit,” Mia cursed as she stood up, running a hand through her hair. “Did she say when he might come back? I mean, you can’t just bring someone back from the dead – there’ll have to be a ritual or something to bring him a body.”

“No, just the servant,” Harry told her.

“You think it might be Peter?” Ron asked as he leaned forward. Harry shrugged.

“I don’t know, she said that the servant had been chained for twelve years – it could be someone from Azkaban getting freed or something,” Harry told them. Hermione sighed as she rested her head on the back of a chair when a cool breeze came into the room, startling them.

Hedwig came in from the window. She hooted softly as she flew over to the back of the couch. Harry looked up and saw that she had a letter tied to her claw.

“Hey girl, who is this from?” Harry asked her as he reached up and stroked her feathers before he untied the letter and took it from her.

He opened the letter and read it, jaw dropping once he comprehended its meaning. "Oh Merlin."

"What?" Hermione demanded as she took the letter out of his hand and read it out loud.

"Lost appeal. They're going to execute at sunset. Nothing you can do. Don't come down. I don't want you to see it. Hagrid."

"I knew it!" Mia exclaimed. "I knew that bastard Malfoy would get his way by bribing them! That's it! They are going down – the whole Ministry!"

"Erm..." Ron started but Mia waved her hand.

"Don't worry, when I'm finished with the Ministry – I'll damn well make sure that your dad gets the job of being Minister – he'll do a far better job than those idiots. He wouldn't touch Lucius was a 10-foot pole let alone take his money," Mia informed him before she turned to face Harry. "Are you sure you want to save this world?"

"Let me give it one more chance – they've used up two already so maybe the third time will be the charm," Harry told her and she nodded.

"We can't just sit around and do nothing!" Hermione exclaimed as she turned her teary eyes to Harry. "We can't let Hagrid be alone when they kill Buckbeak!"

"It's okay... we've never followed bad orders before, and we're not gonna do it now," Harry soothed her as he wrapped an arm around her shoulder to comfort her.

"We'll go down just before the Ministry comes up. That means it'll be before dark – thus no Dementors," Mia told them.

"You're getting no arguments from me," Ron told her. "Are you sure there's nothing you can do?"

"Nope, if Malfoy has paid off the Ministry, then there's no point. All we can do is try and figure out some way to free Buckbeak. But it won't be easy," Mia told him.

"Why is Pansy doing this?" Hermione asked. Harry sighed as he rubbed his hand on her shoulder.

"Because she can. Pansy belongs to a group of people who believe that Purebloods are superior to the rest of us," Harry explained. Hermione just rested her head on his shoulder, wishing for once that they could change the rules.

Everyone was dressed in their robes as they made their way down to the grounds, eager to see Hagrid and console him in this moment of abused justice.

Along the way they spotted someone that looked like an executioner. He was dressed in a black outfit with a black facemask over his face and carrying a large axe. Hermione had faltered briefly when she saw this but Harry placed a hand on the small of her back to encourage her to keep walking. Mia just shot a cold glare toward the man that went unnoticed by its target before she turned back to the path.

As they were making their way past the stone circle they saw Pansy leaning against one of the stones next to two other Slytherin girls.

"This is so pathetic," Pansy told her friends. "And to think that that stupid half blood actually thought she would win the case." The girls giggled in agreement.

"I would have won if you hadn't gotten Malfoy to pay the Ministry off," a cold voice informed them from behind. Pansy spun around and paled when she saw Mia standing behind her with her hands on her hips. "I'd be careful Pansy - sooner or later what goes around, comes around."

"Shut up!" Pansy shouted. "You know nothing! Mr. Malfoy won the case fair and square – they all saw how that awful creature was dangerous." Mia arched an eyebrow.

“Yeah, funny isn’t it? How your arm just seemed to heal overnight after the court case?” Mia asked with a pointed look. “You know just as well I do that I would have won the case if you and Malfoy hadn’t bribed them. One of these days you will get yourself in a sticky mess that not even all your money will be enough to buy your way out.

“Doesn’t matter anyway, does it?” Pansy asked with a smirk. “I won. Would you like the Hippogriff’s head? My dad says I can have it. I’m sure that fat oaf of a friend of yours would like to visit it every now and then.” Hermione lost her temper.

“You spoiled evil BITCH!” Hermione shouted as she ran in front of the group and pointed her wand right up at Pansy’s face. Pansy started to whimper as Millicent and Lisa Moon – the other two Slytherin girls - just stared at Hermione in shock.

“Hermione!” Harry exclaimed as he started off to get her.

“She’s been hanging around you too much!” Ron informed Mia as they both chased after Harry.

“Come on Hermione, let’s go – she’s not worth it!” Harry pleaded. “Hagrid needs us more than she does.”

“Fine,” Hermione finally muttered as she pulled her wand away and stuck it back in her robe pocket. Pansy let out a sigh of relief before she started to laugh condescendingly. Hermione turned her back slowly before quickly spinning back around and throwing a right hook directly into Pansy’s nose, causing it to crack under the pressure and blood to start gushing out. “Serves you right!” hissed Hermione.

Pansy just whimpered as Millicent and Lisa grabbed her by the arms and led her up to the castle. Hermione turned back to face Harry, Mia and Ron, who were looking at her, stunned.

“I don’t know what hell has gotten in to you this year!” Ron exclaimed. “First you walk out on Trelawney and now you punched Pansy!”

“That felt good,” Hermione admitted but Mia just shook her head.

“That wasn’t good – that was fucking brilliant!” Mia exclaimed. Harry just shook his head, amused.

“Come on, Hagrid is waiting for us,” Harry told them and they followed him down.

They came to a stop outside the hut and Ron banged on the door. They waited for a minute until Hagrid opened it.

“What are you four doing here?” Hagrid demanded.

“We got your letter. You didn’t think we were going to stay behind, did you?” Mia demanded as she pushed her way into the hut. “I can’t believe they went with Lucius.”

“He does have a lot of power,” Hagrid reminded her. Mia snorted.

“More like money and threats,” Mia informed him before she looked at Hagrid. “Can’t you just set him free?”

“No, not unless I want to be arrested,” Hagrid explained.

“Damn,” Hermione muttered. “I’ll get some tea,” she told them as she moved into the back of the hut.

“So, who from the Ministry is coming?” Harry asked.

“Fudge is coming and so is the executioner Macnair. Dumbledore is coming down too,” Hagrid told them when Harry’s eyes narrowed at a name.

“Wait a minute, Macnair?” Harry started. “As in Death Eater Macnair?”

“I suppose so. Though it was never proven he was a death eater,” Hagrid told him and Harry shook his head.

“Oh trust me... if he is a friend of Malfoy, he’s a Death Eater,” Harry responded. Mia shook her head.

“More people to add to our list,” Mia told him as Hermione brought over a pot to heat some water. She opened the lid and gasped out loud when she saw something.

“Ron,” she called out. Ron looked at her and widened his eyes in disbelief when he saw she was pulling out of the pot.

“Scabbers,” Harry and Ron exclaimed at the same time. “How the hell did he get here?” Harry demanded.

“I guess he just ran for the first place that seemed safe to him – animals from the castle rarely hang out over here don’t they?” Hermione suggested.

“You crazy rat! Do you have any idea how long I spent looking for you?” Ron asked as he took Scabbers into his hands, though it was a struggle to hold on to him. “What is up with you?”

Harry noticed that every time Scabbers looked at Mia, he seemed to get more frantic. He started to inspect Mia closely, wondering if someone had taken on her appearance. Mia arched an eyebrow at Harry.

“What are you looking at?” Mia asked. “Take a picture, it lasts longer.”

“Who are you?” Harry demanded, causing Mia’s eyes to widen in confusion. Hermione and Ron exchanged puzzled looks with each other before looking at Harry.

“Harry, what’s wrong?” Hagrid asked.

“Every time Scabbers looks at Mia, he freaks out even more,” Harry explained and Mia narrowed her eyes at the rat.

“Are you sure?” Mia asked Harry.

“Yeah, so who the hell are you?” Harry asked.

“It’s me! Mia!” Mia exclaimed only to huff out after a brief silence. “Fine – I used to sleep with Pingu the penguin when I was younger.” Harry nodded.

“OK - she’s Mia. So why is Scabbers suddenly freaking out over her?” Harry asked.

“Maybe he saw her go crazy and thinks she’ll do something to him?” Ron suggested but Hermione shook her head as she moved over to the window and gasped.

“Whatever it is, there’s no time for it right now – the ministry is coming down!” she exclaimed, causing Harry to rush over next to her.

“Out the back, all four of you!” Hagrid ordered and all four of them hurried over to the backdoor and slipped out with Hagrid closing the door behind them. They looked around the side of the hut and saw that Dumbledore was pointing at something in the opposite direction, taking the Ministry’s attention away from them and allowing them to slip over to the pumpkin patch.

Mia peered over a stack of pumpkins and watched as Dumbledore finished his point before Hagrid opened the door and allowed them to walk in.

“Coast is clear,” she whispered to them and they hurried up the hill towards the stone circle. They stopped when they heard muffled voices and waited.

There was a swish of something heavy through the air and then a dull crack before a sickening thud came with it. Hermione covered her mouth in horror while Mia just closed her eyes, fighting the bile that was trying to rise in her throat. Ron just shook his head in denial and looked down at the ground. Harry just stared at the landscape with a stoic look on his face.

“They killed him,” Hermione whispered as she turned to Harry. “They killed him!” Harry just took her into his arms and held her close while Ron and Mia shared a murderous look. Suddenly Ron let out a yelp.

“He bit me!” Ron exclaimed. “Scabbers bit me!” he started chasing after the rat who had fallen to the ground after he bit Ron and ran off.

“Ron!” Harry called out before he pulled away from Hermione and chased after him. Hermione and Mia started chasing after Harry to catch up with their friends.

They finally caught up to Ron as he threw himself onto the ground, grabbing a squealing Scabbers in his hands.

“Scabbers, what is up with you?” Ron demanded. Harry came to a sudden stop when he realised just how close Ron was to the Whomping Willow. He threw his arms out sideways, stopping the girls.

“Oh my, is that...” Hermione trailed off when she saw the tree.

“Yeah, it is,” Harry, confirmed. The tree was beginning to move its branches, obviously unhappy with the fact that the Weasley boy was too close for its own liking. “Ron, you might wanna move,” warned Harry as he kept one eye on the tree.

Ron rolled onto his back away from the tree and towards the others and widened his eyes in surprise when he saw something behind the trio.

“Harry! Look out!” Ron shouted as he pointed behind them. They spun around only for Mia to be flung in one direction while Harry had grabbed Hermione close to him and they were flung in the other direction. They all landed on their backs with a hard thud before Hermione scrambled and rolled onto her front, lying on top of Harry. Mia propped herself up onto her elbows and saw a black dog rushing towards Ron before he leapt into the air and landed his other side.

Ron let out a scream of agony as the dog's mouth clamped down over his leg and dragged him over to the entrance that was hidden by the Whomping Willow.

“HARRY!” Ron shouted only to disappear out of sight, leaving the three of them dumbstruck.

“What was that!?” Hermione exclaimed as she stared at the point where the dog had dragged Ron down near the roots of the Whomping Willow. Harry, Hermione and Mia looked at each other before they turned back to the entrance once more and groaned.

TBC

Chapter 11: Shrieking Shack, Answers and Dementors

"Oh man, how the hell are we gonna get past the tree?" Mia asked as she, Hermione and Harry stood a safe distance away, thinking about how they were going to get past it. The tree's branches were already swinging, trying to stretch out and hit someone or something in its frustration.

"Think like practice," Harry told them. "Duck and Roll. Jump and bounce."

"And I thought we were suppose to use those tactics against spells, not branches," Hermione informed him.

"Same thing," Harry shot back. "On three. One, Two, Three!" they all ran forward, jumping out the way as a branch swiped at them. They managed to duck and roll whenever a branch swung into their area until finally Mia reached the hole and slid down.

Harry jumped as a branch tried to swipe his feet from underneath him only to be flung sideways as another branch hit him in the middle of his jump. Hermione jumped up and grabbed onto a branch.

The tree wasn't happy and decided to make that fact known to the girl that had dared to cling onto it. The branch swung wildly in a futile attempt to dislodge its unwanted passenger. Then the tree apparently decided to try another tactic and tried to bash the girl against other branches.

Harry was watching Hermione and trying to find someway to save her. He stood up to try and grab her, but Hermione grabbed his shirt instead and yanked him along with her. She correctly timed the next swing and let Harry go, throwing him down the hole.

Harry landed on his back with a large thud and a groan. He was sitting up when another body collided with his, knocking him back onto the ground.

"Sorry," Hermione apologised as she got up on her arms. Harry nodded.

“Could you please get off me?” Harry asked softly as he tried to ignore his body’s reaction. He couldn’t believe his body sometimes – they were in the middle of a rescue mission and it was trying to show Hermione just how attracted to her he was.

Hermione climbed off him before helping him up and they both saw Mia standing there.

“Boy, you two sure take your time, don’t you?” she asked, trying to imply that their delay was caused by something other than difficulty with the tree. But of course Harry and Hermione didn’t get it as they led the way down the passage.

“Where do you think this leads?” Hermione asked.

“I don’t know – the map shows that it leads down into Hogsmeade but it never showed when it stopped,” Harry explained.

They hurried through the passage as fast as they could. Finally they reached some stairs that they started to climb before Harry felt his head hit something hard. “Damnit!” he rubbed the top of his head before he pushed the wooden trapdoor out of the way. He looked over the edge to see that he had arrived in some sort of house.

He climbed through the trapdoor before helping Hermione and then helping Mia through.

Mia brushed her hands on her robes, brushing away the dirt on her hands.

“Where the hells are we?” Mia asked as she looked around. The building had definitely seen better times. The floor was dusty and the walls were creaking in the wind.

“I have a feeling about where we are,” Harry told them. “But I hope I’m wrong.” With that, he took Hermione’s hand and led her up the stairs with Mia taking up the rear.

They came to a stop at a door at the top of the stairs. Harry slowly pushed it open. When they peeked into the room they saw Ron, much to their relief.

“Ron!” Harry exclaimed as he and Hermione hurried over to him. He was sitting on an old mouldy mattress and his leg was slightly bandaged. “Where’s the dog?” Harry asked. Ron shook his head.

“It wasn’t a dog!” Ron exclaimed before he pointed to behind Mia. “It was him!” The door behind Mia creaked, causing all three of them to spin around only to let out a sigh of relief when a familiar face came into view.

“Dad!” Mia exclaimed as she ran over to him and hugged him tight before pulling away and hitting him on the shoulder. “What the hell do you think you are doing?” she demanded.

“Getting what I want,” Sirius told them as he moved over to Ron. “Where’s the rat?”

“What is going on?” Hermione demanded only to get no answer. “Why do you want Ron’s pet?”

“Because he...” Sirius started but was cut off when the door opened, revealing Remus Lupin standing in the doorway. He stared at Sirius with a look akin to shock, yet it was underpinned with a faint look of hope as well.

“Remus?” Sirius asked, refusing to believe that his old friend was standing in front of him.

“Sirius,” Remus greeted before they embraced each other in a hug.

“Great, now that we’re all acquainted, does someone want to tell me why you want my rat?” Ron exclaimed.

“Because it’s not a rat,” Sirius informed the red haired teenager, causing him to look at Sirius like he had lost his mind.

“Dad, just how long have you been like this?” Mia asked, worried about her father. Sirius chuckled.

“Don’t worry, I haven’t lost my mind,” Sirius promised her. “That rat is not what you think it is.”

“Scabbers been in my family for twelve years, don’t you think we would know if he wasn’t a rat?” Ron asked, curious about Sirius’ accusations.

“Twelve years? An awfully long time for a common rat, isn’t it?” Sirius asked and Lupin rolled his eyes.

“Get to the point Sirius,” Lupin informed him.

“Fine, that rat is actually Peter,” Sirius told them. Lupin looked at the rat with a curious look but Mia threw up her hands in confusion.

“Whoa, wait a minute, if the rat is Peter, then why would he stay a rat all this time? I mean, he spent almost three years in the same room as Harry – and as we know that he betrayed Harry’s parents. So why wouldn’t he try and kill Harry?” Mia asked.

“Because he may be weak but he’s not that stupid. Harry is too powerful for Peter to take him on. Besides, he wouldn’t do anything unless there’s something in it for himself,” Sirius explained to his daughter.

“Great, that’s just great,” Mia muttered under her breath when the doors slammed open once more, startling everyone. They turned to see Snape standing in the doorway. “Can my day *get* any worse?” Mia asked rhetorically.

Snape moved into the room, pointing his wand at Sirius, who was backing slowly away.

“I had hoped I’d be the one to catch you, Black,” Snape informed him. Sirius just glared at Snape.

“What is your problem with Uncle Sirius?” Harry shouted as Hermione grabbed his hand to hold him back from attacking anyone.

“It’s because I played a trick on him,” Sirius told Harry out the side of his mouth while watching Snape warily. “He noticed that Remus was sneaking out of the castle once a month and got suspicious. I told him that if he was to press the knot at the base of the Whomping Willow

tree and follow the path that he would find out what was going on.” Hermione covered her mouth.

“And he almost met a full grown werewolf,” Hermione gasped out and Mia closed her eyes.

“We were young at the time. Snape kept following us about, trying to get us expelled, and we thought it would get the greasy git to back off from us. But he just tried even harder to stick his nose into our lives!” Sirius explained.

“What does that have to do with my father?” Harry asked, curious.

“Your dad heard what Sirius had done and headed him off,” Lupin explained. “Your dad risked his life to save Snape’s.”

“Very touching moment,” Snape sneered. “But I’m afraid our tender moment is over. The Dementors are waiting for you, Black. Time to get what you deserve!”

“No! You’re not taking him anywhere based on a stupid grudge!” Mia snapped.

“Hold your tongue Miss Black! For once you’re not in trouble, so you’d think you would keep that mouth of yours *shut!*” Snape shouted, as he was about to wave his wand. Three people got theirs off first.

“Expelliarmus!” Harry, Hermione and Mia cried out together and all three spells hit Snape in the chest simultaneously, sending him flying backward.

“You just blasted Snape!” Ron uttered out in shock. “Oh man, we’re gonna be in so much trouble when he wakes up.”

“Okay, back to the original conversation,” Harry ordered them. “How can you prove that the rat is Peter?”

“There’s a spell, and it won’t harm normal animals,” Sirius told him. Ron thrust the rat into Lupin’s hands and Lupin moved over next to Sirius.

They both pulled out their wands and muttered something under their breath. A bright blue light shot out of each wand and hit the rat, who slowly began to grow until it revealed a ragged looking man. His hair was balding in some patches and his front teeth were quite large. He tended to wiggle his nose every now and then; apparently no one was supposed to be in their animagus form for such a long period of time.

"Peter," Sirius and Lupin greeted coldly together as they stared down at the man who used to be one of their best friends.

"Sirius, Remus," Peter gasped out. "My oldest and dearest friends." He was about to scoot past them when Sirius' wand got in his way.

"Not leaving so fast are you?" Sirius asked. Ron just stared at Peter the whole time with a slack jaw.

"Wait, are you saying I had an animagus in my bed the whole time?" Ron demanded incredulously and Sirius nodded.

"I noticed the rat in the paper that told us that your family won the money and went on holiday. When I saw that Scabbers had a part missing from his paw in your family's picture, it hit me," Sirius explained. Understanding dawned on Hermione.

"The biggest part they ever found of Peter was his finger - the one he cut off," Hermione exclaimed.

"Why did you kill Lily and James?" Sirius hissed to the short man.

"I didn't want to!" Peter moaned. "The Dark Lord - he has powers - strong and dark powers, and he controlled me! What would you have done?"

"I would have DIED!" Sirius snarled. "Died rather than give up my friends to an egotistical bastard!"

Peter inched his way over towards the door only to flinch when he saw that Mia was now blocking the only exit.

“Don’t even think about it,” Mia hissed out, her blue eyes flaring and Peter felt a chill go down his back.

“So much like your mother you are,” Peter told her and she gave a cold smile.

“Not that I will ever know, considering that you took her away from me before I could get to know her,” Mia informed him.

Peter walked backwards. He was scared of Mia and she knew it. Callie was dangerous when she wanted to be and it seemed that she had passed that trait on to her daughter. “It’s thank to you that we have had to live our lives without our parents,” Mia told him, motioning towards Harry.

“I didn’t mean to!” Peter wailed as he slumped down next to Ron and started pawing at his robes. “I was a good rat, wasn’t I?” Peter pleaded. “You took care of me.”

“Get away from me!” Ron exclaimed, shivering with disgust that he had let this man sleep in his bed.

Peter desperately turned to another person in the room and his eyes landed on Hermione. He crawled over to her, tugging at the bottom of her robes.

“Sweet girl, you wouldn’t let them harm me, would you?” Peter pleaded. Hermione tugged at her robes, wanting to get away from the man as far as she could.

“Stay away from her!” Harry shouted as he grabbed the back of Peter and flung him across the room and away from Hermione before he stood in front of her. “You are not to go anywhere near her!”

Hermione gripped the back of Harry’s jumper as she stood on tiptoes to look over his shoulder at what was happening.

“You look like you father, just like James...” Peter told him.

"HOW DARE YOU!" Sirius roared, causing everyone to jump. "How dare you look at Harry and remind him he looks like James when you caused their deaths!"

"That wasn't my fault!" Peter squeaked out.

"You handed them over to Voldemort; you gave them the key to their lives and destroyed it!" Sirius shot back.

"No," Peter moaned. "I was weak and he was strong."

"You should have died Peter! You should have known that we would kill you if we ever caught up with you," Lupin told him as he and Sirius lifted their wands, preparing themselves to kill Peter, who cowered on his knees in front of his oldest friends.

"No!" Harry jumped in front of Peter, placing himself in the way of the wands. Hermione covered her mouth when she saw this.

"Harry?" Sirius asked confused to what his nephew was doing.

"If you kill him, then you are just adding more charges to your list. We have to take him back up to the school and prove to them that he's alive and that you're innocent," Harry told him. "Uncle Sirius, you could be free tomorrow."

Sirius took a step back as realization dawned on him. He had his freedom right here, in the palm of his hand. All he had to do is what Harry told him and he would be free to walk in the sunlight among Diagon Alley without a bounty on his head.

"He's right," Remus agreed. "It would be nice to be with my best friend again." Sirius looked at Remus and he smiled before he looked at Harry.

"Okay, we'll do it your way," Sirius told him and Harry shot him a relieved smile.

"Oh, thank you, thank you," Peter sobbed as he clutched the back of Harry's robes, only for Harry to yank it out of his hands.

"I'm not doing this for you. My parents and Aunt Callie deserve justice for what you have done to them and I'm making sure they get it," Harry shot at him.

"Thank you, it's more than I deserve," Peter told him and Harry snorted.

"Yeah, tell me about it," Harry told him before he looked at the others. "Let's get him out of here and up to the castle so we can finally bring this nightmare to an end." Everyone nodded in agreement.

Ron started to stand up in preparation to leave but his face turned paler as he did so, causing Mia to rush over him. She untied the bandage before she grabbed two sticks that were lying on the floor.

Mia placed the sticks on either side of Ron's leg and re-tied the bandage around him, tightening it as she went.

"Sorry," she told him when she saw the pain flitter across his face. "This is the one way to keep your leg stabilised till we get up to Madam Pomfrey. Otherwise you'll lose too much blood."

"It's alright, just get me out of here," Ron pleaded and Mia nodded as she stood up and moved round to Ron's side to help him up.

Harry moved toward Hermione, who was still staring at him in shock before she let loose.

"What is it with you?" Hermione demanded, startling Harry. "Why is it that you need to place yourself in danger year after year?"

"Hermione..." Harry started.

"Don't you ever do that to me again," Hermione exclaimed as she punched Harry's chest before burying her face there and holding onto him.

"Don't worry, she's just a little freaked out that Harry placed himself in front of your wands rather than shouting to get your attention," Mia explained from where she was helping Ron up. She had seen the

confused look on the two men when they saw Hermione lose her temper with Harry and wondered what had brought that on.

“Oh, here, I’ll help you,” Remus told them as he moved over to the other side of Ron and helped him up. “Really Sirius, did you have to maul his leg?” Remus asked, aghast.

“Where would you have me bite him? His torso?” Sirius shot back as he bounded Snape and Peter up.

Harry and Mia rolled their eyes together before Harry turned to them.

“Come on, Hermione and I will lead the way. I have a feeling that if I don’t get her out of here, she’ll kick my ass,” Harry told them as he led Hermione down the stairs. Ron was sandwiched between Lupin and Mia, who helped him down the stairs, while Sirius took up the rear, levitating a tied up Peter and an unconscious Snape behind them.

They finally made their way out of the hole under the Whomping Willow. Harry placed Hermione down on to the ground next to the lake before kneeling down in front of her and brushed away a strand of her hair.

“Are you okay?” he asked, looking into her brown eyes. Hermione nodded.

“Yeah, just too many bombshells on top of each other. Plus my year hasn’t made it any easier,” she explained. Harry smiled.

“Yeah, I bet it hasn’t,” Harry teased, getting a smile out of Hermione as Mia and Lupin sat Ron down next to her. Harry turned to him. “You alright, mate?” Harry asked and Ron nodded as he gave Harry thumbs up.

“Never better,” Ron groaned out, giving him a weak smile. Harry couldn’t help but smile at Ron’s brave attempt. Snape was set down next to Ron while Lupin looked him over.

“He’s alive, but he will have a huge headache when he wakes up,” Lupin told them and they nodded. Harry looked off to the side and

saw that Sirius was standing a few feet away from them, looking towards Hogwarts.

“Stay here... I’ll be right back,” Harry told them before he moved over to Sirius.

“Don’t you try anything Peter,” Mia warned the balding man, who just shivered and kept his eyes focused down at the dirt in front of him.

“Uncle Sirius?” Harry asked as he moved closer to Sirius. Sirius looked to his side and smiled down at his nephew.

“Sorry for scaring you this year,” Sirius apologised but Harry waved it away.

“It’s Mia you should be saying sorry to. She has been a nightmare this year!” Harry exclaimed and Sirius chuckled. “No, I’m not kidding – she went to court.” Sirius looked at him, shocked.

“What?” Sirius exclaimed and Harry grinned.

“Oh yea, you see, Hagrid got these hippogriffs, right, and Pansy went ahead and insulted one of them,” Sirius winced and Harry nodded. “Yeah, so she went crying to her daddy and her daddy went to Malfoy. It ended up in a legal battle – Mia took on the role of defence. And man, was she scary or what? She chewed out the Ministry and Lucius all in the one go.”

Sirius looked at his daughter, who was tending to Hermione while scolding Ron at the same time for something he had said and shook his head.

“Her mother was always a good fighter. But Mia – she’s so dedicated when it comes to legal things like that – she’ll make it big time in the muggle or the wizarding world,” Sirius told Harry.

“Not to mention the time she chewed out Snape in class,” Harry told him before moving over to his friends, leaving Sirius staring after Harry with a shocked look on his face before he followed Harry.

“How do you plan to do all this?” Lupin asked.

“Well, first we’ll drag Peter into the castle. You will have to come with us and we’ll tell Dumbledore everything. Uncle Sirius will have to stay hidden for the time being until the Ministry officially pardons him,” Harry told them and Lupin nodded.

“Good plan,” he told Harry before moving off a little way when a female voice caught everyone’s attention.

“Harry!” Hermione shouted and everyone looked at her. “It’s a full moon!” Startled, everyone spun around and saw the full moon coming out from behind the clouds. Lupin started to whine from the back of his throat as Sirius rushed over to Lupin and gripped his shoulders.

“Remus, old friend, did you take your potion?” Sirius demanded.

Mia looked over to where Peter was beginning to sneak away before she grabbed a rock and threw it hard at the back of Peter’s head, causing him to let out a small shriek before he fell to the ground. She quickly went over and bound his hands and ankles so he wouldn’t get loose again.

Lupin’s head was flung back as his clothes started ripping from the pressure of Lupin’s changing body. His hands went to his head and his skin started peeling away, revealing grey hair underneath. His nose got longer and formed a snout, while his hands moved down over his body, ripping away the rest of his clothing and skin. A grey werewolf now stood in place of Remus Lupin.

Lupin swung his arm, sending Sirius flying to the side before he looked around and saw the teenagers standing there. His yellow eyes narrowed in anticipation.

“Oh, not good,” Ron moaned as Lupin made his way over to them.

Snape woke up with a blinding headache and saw Potter standing next to him. Fuelled on by a sudden rage, he stood up and made his way over the remaining distance towards Harry.

“Think you’ll get away with striking me, Potter?” Snape demanded as he grabbed Harry’s robes only to see that Harry wasn’t looking at him, he was looking over Snape’s shoulder.

Puzzled, Snape turned around only to pale even further when he saw a werewolf watching them closely. He spread his arms out in front the kids in an instinctive effort to protect them.

“Professor Lupin?” Hermione called out but Snape shook his head.

“He needs to take his potion before he can even recognise you, and he forgot to take it tonight,” Snape explained.

“Oh my god!” Mia whispered as Snape shielded them from the werewolf. Lupin was about to strike at Snape when he was knocked sideways by a large black blur.

Everyone turned to see a black dog fighting with the werewolf and it dawned on them. Sirius had changed to his other form to protect them. Sirius hadn’t changed into his animagus form very often at home for his own protection; if the neighbours saw Sirius as a dog running around the house it would have created a level of questioning that none of them were ready to deal with.

They watched as Sirius pulled Lupin down to the ground before Lupin bucked him back off, throwing him clear before chasing after him.

“Uncle Sirius!” Harry shouted as he slipped under Snape’s arms and ran after them.

“Potter!” Snape shouted while Hermione screamed his name as she futilely fought Snape’s grip. Harry only had one thing on his mind – get to Sirius before he lost him again.

“Dad!” Mia screamed as she chased after them both hot on Harry's heels. “Keep an eye on Peter, hit him again if he wakes up!” she shouted over her shoulder.

Harry came to a sudden stop when he saw the werewolf and the black dog fighting with each other again before the werewolf scored a hit with an arm, sending the dog flying over the hill.

“Uncle Sirius!” Harry shouted in fear only for the werewolf to spin around and lock his yellow eyes on Harry. Mia managed to slip past unnoticed as she hurried after her father while Harry distracted the

werewolf from going after her. The werewolf let out a small growl as Harry kept backing away slowly. Just as the werewolf lifted his paw to strike a howling noise in the woods distracted him.

The werewolf stopped a few inches short of Harry and looked towards the woods with a puzzled moan before he turned back to Harry and bared his teeth. Another howl came from the woods and he bolted off in that direction, leaving Harry alone and unscathed before Harry frowned in puzzlement.

"I don't remember there being another werewolf in the forest," he muttered to himself before he hurried over to where Sirius had been flung over.

He found Sirius lying next to the shallow lake. Mia was shaking her dad, trying to get him to wake up but it wasn't working. She turned when she heard a noise and saw Harry behind her.

"Harry, the Dementors are coming! Dad won't wake up!" Mia explained as she pointed to the water. He saw it was beginning to ice over and Harry felt fear grip his heart as he hurried over to Mia, knelt down beside her and helped her try to rouse her dad. Sirius was unresponsive other than some soft mumbling. The Dementors' hold was taking over.

Mia's head snapped up and she gasped when she saw Dementors surrounding them. She grabbed Harry's robe sleeves, causing Harry to look at her before he looked up and paled too.

A single Dementor moved closer to Sirius and was about to bend down. Harry and Mia could see a small blue ball slipping out of Sirius' mouth and it hit them what it was. Sirius' soul.

"NO!" Mia screamed as Harry pulled out his wand.

"Expecto Patronum!" Harry shouted and a silvery mist shot out of his wand. Mia however had felt herself weakening and her eyes rolled up in the back of her head before she slumped down onto the ground next to her father.

Harry was reinforcing his good thoughts – Sirius being free, being together with Hermione, when all of a sudden a bright light shot out from over close to the woods.

Harry watched as a large silver stag almost systematically make its way across the icy lake, hitting each Dementor with its antlers and causing them to shriek in fear and agony. As each one was hit more and more of them flew away, unable to deal with the pure happiness that was attacking them.

Harry fell to his knees as he watched as the stag walk back over towards a familiar-looking male standing where the stag made its way over before darkness started to claim him.

“Dad?” he whispered before he fell backward as darkness claimed him.

TBC

Chapter 12: Hospital Wing and More Time.

Harry found himself slowly waking up. He still felt fuzzy and unsure when he cracked his eyes open and saw two familiar brown eyes looking down into his own.

"Hermione?" Harry asked groggily.

"You gotta get up," Hermione whispered.

"Why?" Harry whispered as he slowly stretched and sat up. Hermione handed him his glasses.

"Peter escaped – don't ask me how he did it, but he escaped. So the Ministry is bringing in a Dementor to give Sirius the kiss tonight," Hermione told him softly as she flicked a look over to the doors.

"What about Ron and Mia?" Harry asked, as he looked over to the other two.

"Ron has a broken leg; it's set in a cast. Mia is in a deep sleep at the moment. The Dementors took a lot out of her, plus Madam Pomfrey says her exhaustion levels are high due to all the stress she's been through this year worrying about her father," Hermione explained.

"Great," Harry muttered as he stood up from the bed. McGonagall came into the room and she let out a sigh of relief when she saw that Harry and Hermione were awake.

"Oh good, you're awake," she told them.

"Professor, Sirius is innocent – we saw Peter!" Hermione whispered to her teacher but McGonagall held up her hands, stopping them.

"I know that, but the Ministry won't believe the word of two 13 year-olds – you will need evidence before they take your word," she told them and Harry let out a frustrated grunt. He raked his hand through his hair when McGonagall turned and pinned Hermione with a look that Harry couldn't interpret. "What we need is more *time*." Hermione nodded in understanding. "Three turns should do it, Miss Granger." With that, she left the hospital wing and Harry turned to Hermione.

“What the hell was that about?” Harry asked but Hermione shook her head as she grabbed the necklace from under her shirt and looped it around both their necks. Then she twisted the funny circle at the end of the necklace.

Everything started rushing backward – Harry looked around and saw that time was reversing itself with Harry and Hermione standing still in the middle of the whole thing. The motion backwards finally stopped and Hermione yanked the chain off of Harry’s neck and tucked it back into her jumper.

“Hermione...” Harry trailed off, confused about what the hell was happening.

“We don’t have time,” Hermione started but Harry grabbed her elbow and spun her around to meet him, not allowing her to brush him off. Hermione couldn’t help the stab of desire as Harry did this before she looked up into his green eyes.

“You are going to tell me what the hell is going on and you’re going to tell me now,” Harry ground out. Hermione gulped slightly before she held her head high.

“I’ve been using a time turner to get to my classes,” she told him and Harry’s eyes widened in shock and anger.

“You what?” Harry demanded. “You’ve been using a time turner all year? No wonder you have been exhausted!”

“Harry, I had to go to all my classes,” Hermione told him and Harry just glared back.

“You didn’t need to take muggle studies – you are already a muggle-born and you don’t need it at all. You dropped Divination. Please, tell me that you will be giving up the time turner after this,” Harry told her.

“Harry,” Hermione started but Harry shook his head.

“No Hermione, tell me you are giving up the time turner when school is finished – Mia, Draco and I have been through a time turner. It’s very dangerous and you are exhausting yourself in the process.

Haven't you ever wondered why we always seem to act older than we are?" Harry asked and Hermione nodded. "The time turner did that. By going back in time, we ended up aging. That's why we are more emotionally mature than we're supposed to be."

"Oh," Hermione uttered, shocked.

"Please, just give up the time turner when school is finished – I couldn't bear to see you going through the same exhausting year all over again. You were stressed and exhausted and you are still are," Harry told her and Hermione sighed.

"Okay, I'll give up the time turner when the term is finished," Hermione promised him and Harry let out a sigh a relief. He let Hermione's elbow go before he revisited the subject about why they had gone back in time.

"Did anyone say how Peter escaped?" Harry asked and Hermione shook her head.

"No, I was in the hospital wing when I found out," Hermione explained. He didn't get back up after Mia hit him on the head with the rock so I'm guessing that something else must have happened."

"Great, okay – so we'll try and figure out some way to save everyone – including Buckbeak. This gives us the chance to save more than two lives," Harry told her and she nodded. "Did they give an estimation of when Peter escaped?"

"Ron was mumbling something about him changing again just before the Ministry came to get us from Snape," Hermione told him and Harry cursed.

"He must have somehow changed back and slipped away, the rat!" Harry muttered before he held up his hands and shook his head.

"Okay, we'll get Buckbeak first but we're gonna have to do it quickly because the only window we have to save him is when the Ministry goes inside Hagrid's hut."

"That's like in 1 minute!" Hermione told him and Harry nodded.

"I know – we'll hide him out in the woods. Straight after that, we'll need to hide somewhere until it gets dark and try to figure out who the hell saved my life with the Dementors and how we can get to Peter before he changes," Harry finished off.

"What do you mean, saved your life?" Hermione asked.

"I didn't cast the Patronus - someone else did. Someone who looks like me. If I didn't know any better, I'd say it was my dad," Harry told her and Hermione nodded before she held up her hands.

"Let's just get down to Hagrid's place now," Harry told her. They quickly rushed down only to stop short when they saw the four of them standing at the stone circle with Pansy and her two friends. "Great punch by the way," Harry praised and Hermione smiled briefly before it faded.

"Oh, she's coming this way," Hermione told him. They both rushed over to the gap between the structures and jumped down, hiding under the stone. Pansy and her friends ran by them.

They watched as their other selves hurried down to Hagrid's hut while the two of them slipped through the pumpkin patch, trying to stay low and hide behind the largest pumpkins along the way.

"This is too weird," Harry muttered to himself and Hermione smiled at him.

"Tell me about it," she told him before she eyed him curiously. "This didn't happen to you when you used the time turner before?"

"No, we always were in a different area each time," Harry explained. Hermione nodded as she turned back and saw the group inching their way over to the backdoor as the Ministry started to make their way down the path.

"Okay, now we're coming out the back," Hermione told Harry. They both rushed down the small path that led them to the forest and hid behind the trees while they watched their other selves hurry over to the pumpkins and hide behind them.

Soon, their other selves hurried away from the pumpkin patch, running up the hill, allowing Harry and Hermione to rush forward towards Buckbeak. Harry grabbed the chain that was tied to the post and slipped it off before he bowed in front of Buckbeak. Buckbeak watched him for a second before he bowed back.

“Come on Buckbeak,” Harry pleaded as he tugged on the chain to no avail. Hermione came over with a couple of dead ferrets from the pen nearby and threw one to Buckbeak, who caught it in his mouth. She dangled another ferret in front of Buckbeak as incentive.

“Here boy, come and get the nice dead ferret,” she tempted quietly. Buckbeak stood up and followed the prize away from the hut and into the forest just before the Ministry stepped out. Harry and Hermione hurried around the trees and watched as they noticed that Buckbeak was gone.

“Where’s the hippogriff?” Fudge demanded as he looked around.

“My, it looks like he must have escaped,” Dumbledore told them.

“He’s freed himself! Good for you, Beaky,” Hagrid praised the missing Hippogriff.

“I’d better call out some men to have them search the grounds,” Fudge was saying but Dumbledore stopped him short.

“Search the skies, you mean,” Dumbledore reminded and Fudge nodded. Dumbledore turned to Macnair. “Executioner, it looks like we won’t be needing your services today.” He continued on to Hagrid. “I wouldn’t mind a spot of tea.”

“I have brandy in the cupboard professor,” Hagrid told him and Dumbledore glowed.

“Excellent, that’ll do,” Dumbledore told him as Hagrid led him back into hut while Macnair lost his temper and brought the axe down onto a nearby innocent pumpkin.

Harry and Hermione turned to face each other with a look of relief as the tugged on Buckbeak's leash and they headed further into the woods away from everyone.

"Now we have to wait until night time," Hermione told him and Harry agreed. They moved over to a small patch where they could watch the Whomping Willow and their previous attempts to make their way into the entrance.

"So, why did you accept the time turner?" Harry asked. He was curious to what had possessed Hermione into taking up the deal. Harry couldn't help the anger that was building up inside of him. He really liked Hermione but she had confused him too much – last year, she was all hot and cold and this year she had lied to him. He couldn't start a relationship with her unless they started being completely honest with each other.

"Harry..." Hermione started but Harry shook his head as he pinned Hermione with a dark look.

"No Hermione, we have time to kill and I want to know what the hell possessed you into taking up the time turner – I'm sick of this!" Harry burst out. Hermione looked at him, startled. "Last year, you were all hot and cold on me. You had a good excuse, true, and I understand that. But you lied to me Hermione – I asked you what it was and you lied. Then I asked you to come to me if it was dangerous. You promised you would but you lied again."

Hermione looked down at her hands as Harry's anger and words ran over her like cold water. She couldn't believe how things had changed so quickly and she wondered if she had destroyed Harry's trust in her. As she was looking down she saw a larger hand cover hers.

Startled, Hermione looked up and saw Harry looking at her, this time not out of anger but worry. "Hermione, I thought we were best friends."

"We are!" Hermione hurried out as she placed her other hand on top of Harry's, sincerely wanting him to believe that he was her best friend. "I'm sorry. I'm just used to doing this on my own."

“Hermione,” Harry lifted her chin so they could look at each other. “I don’t know what to tell you. We’ve told you over and over again that we won’t abandon you, but you just won’t let us in. You pile everything onto your shoulders and leave us in the cold - leave *me* in the cold.”

“I’m sorry,” Hermione whispered but Harry shook his head.

“I’m sorry too, but sorry isn’t going to cut it anymore. I can’t do this anymore – I can’t live my life in a limbo waiting for you to come around and finally let me in – we trust each other but you obviously don’t trust me enough,” Harry told her. Hermione couldn’t help the tears that filled her eyes.

“I do!” she burst out. “I trust you *too* much, that’s my problem. I’m scared that if I let you in completely then I’ll be dependent on you – I wouldn’t be able to cope when you finally realise that I’m not worth it!”

Harry couldn’t help his eyes widening as he looked at Hermione, shocked at what she had just revealed. “I was scared of my feelings for you last year because it was getting too tense too fast – Merlin, Harry, we were only twelve and it’s not getting easier this year – my feelings are going all over the place. My heart is telling me to let you in, to let you see me but my head is telling me to protect my heart from getting hurt. If something was to happen to you, I just know that I wouldn’t be able to deal with it,” Hermione explained before shaking her head. “I took the time turner to get away from my feelings and forget everything.”

“Hermione...” Harry whispered as he reached out and drew her into a hug. Hermione clung to him like she was drowning at sea.

“I need you so much that it scares me,” Hermione whispered into his robes before she pulled away and looked up at Harry, her dark eyes glittering in the moonlight. “The fact that I depend on you so much makes me wonder just how will I get on if I were to lose you.”

Harry closed his eyes as he rested his forehead on hers, inhaling the scent that was Hermione.

"I feel the same," Harry whispered before he opened his eyes and locked them with Hermione. "I depend on you to be there for me when I need it. I felt so lost without you this year and I never want to feel that way again." Hermione gave a small sniffle as Harry moved his face down. Their lips met in a soft brush when screaming filled the air, startling the two of them.

They broke away from each other and stood up. Looking around they saw that Lupin was changing into a werewolf. Harry spoke to Hermione with hard glint in his eyes.

"Okay, when did the Ministry come by?" Harry asked.

"About two minutes after you left," Hermione told him and Harry calculated in his head.

"Okay, that's more than enough time because it took about ten minutes before I found Mia and Uncle Sirius," Harry told her and she looked at him, puzzled.

"What the hell are you planning?" Hermione demanded but Harry covered her mouth before pointing in a direction.

"See the gap over there," he pointed to where there was a small gap in the woods, near when he almost ran into the werewolf. Hermione nodded. "Meet me there. I will have Peter with me – I'll have to go because you're already there. Because you lot are busy, though, you won't notice me."

"Okay, just watch out," Hermione pleaded and Harry nodded as they both ran in opposite directions.

Harry snuck up behind the original group as he watched them with a close eye. Once he was settled he shifted his eyes to focus on Peter. He nodded to himself when he saw that Peter was slowly transforming himself into a rat and slipping out of his bonds. He quickly shot a spell at the rat to knock it unconscious before he mumbled something under his breath.

He held out his hand and the rat zoomed over and came to rest in it. Harry cast another spell, this time an enchantment. It would prevent

Peter from waking up. Mission accomplished, he hurried off to meet up with Hermione.

He found the bushy haired girl in the gap where he had asked her to wait for him. Hermione's head snapped around to meet him and she gave him a sigh of relief before resuming her lookout.

"Did you get him?" Hermione asked and Harry nodded. He handed her Scabbers and Hermione tucked him into a box she had conjured up. After shrinking it she placed it into her pocket.

The time to act once again was getting closer as the werewolf was moving closer to the 'original' Harry while Mia hurried past him. Hermione looked around for something to help her save Harry when something came to her mind about werewolves.

Hermione covered her mouth and howled, causing Harry to reach over and cover her mouth as the werewolf looked in their direction.

"What are you doing?" Harry hissed.

"Saving your life," Hermione shot back before she howled once more, this time drawing the werewolf away from his original target.

"Thanks," Harry told her while a nagging feeling started up in the back of his mind. He grabbed Hermione's hand when he realised that the werewolf was heading for them. "Now he's heading for us!"

"Yeah, didn't think about that one," she replied before Harry tugged on her hand, yanking her backward as they ran off deeper into the forbidding forest.

They reached the largest tree they could find before hiding themselves behind it. The werewolf sniffed the air as he walked about. Harry and Hermione tried to keep the tree between them and the predator, hoping that the werewolf would just go past them without looking back. But apparently like fate weren't on their side.

Harry peered round the tree and noticed that the other side of the area was clear. He pulled Hermione behind him while keeping his eye

on the werewolf. Hermione clung on to the back of his robes as she too eyed the werewolf over Harry's shoulder.

Lupin was about to jump towards them when Buckbeak came out and started flapping his wings like mad and lifting himself up on his hind legs, squawking loudly. The werewolf let out a whine in the back of his throat and ran off.

Hermione just rested her head on Harry's chest, sighing in relief.

"Poor Professor Lupin, he's not having a good night," Harry told her but Hermione shook her head.

"That was horrible," she whispered. Harry just rubbed her back for a moment until they felt the air get noticeably colder around them and the leaves on the forest floor blowing toward them. Harry's head snapped up toward the gaps in the trees and he saw the Dementors flying closer to their clearing.

"Uncle Sirius," Harry told Hermione and they both ran off in the direction of the lake to where they saw Sirius lying on the ground with Mia. The original timeline's Harry was shaking him as the Dementors started to surround them. "No one is coming," Harry whispered as he looked around when it hit him.

"You have no idea how much you look like your father these days – the only thing that gives it away that you're not James is your eyes," Sirius had once told Harry back when he was younger. Harry's green eyes lit up with understanding before he ran out. Whipping out his wand he pointed it towards the Dementors.

"Expecto Patronum!" Harry shouted as the memory of him and Hermione relaxing together flashed into his mind. A bright light shot out of Harry's wand before it coalesced into a stag. It sprang off towards the Dementors almost before it was fully formed and started to hit them with its antlers.

The Dementors let out screeches of agony; unable to deal with the pure happiness that was attacking them. First one and then increasing numbers flew off to get away from the stag.

Harry watched as the stag came back over to him and stood in front of him. Harry reached out gingerly. "Prongs," he whispered and the stag bowed its head before it disappeared.

"Harry!" Hermione exclaimed as she hurried over to him. "You just performed the charm!"

"I know!" Harry exclaimed. "I remember how everyone kept saying how much I look like my dad - that the only way to tell the difference is that I have a scar and green eyes - and I realised that I could have seen myself from a distance and thought it was him."

"We have to get back to the castle and give them the box with Scabbers! It's the only way to clear Sirius!" Hermione exclaimed and Harry nodded as they ran over to Buckbeak.

Hermione slipped the chain off his neck before standing in front of him. "Stay here Buckbeak, we'll come back for you." Buckbeak let out a squawk before he pawed the ground. Hermione grabbed Harry's hand and they both ran up to the castle as quickly as they could.

They saw McGonagall coming out of the hospital wing; she nearly shut the door behind her when she saw the two of them.

"I'll be back with the Ministry and Snape. I presume you have Peter on you?" she asked and Hermione nodded.

"Yes, get them back very soon," Hermione pleaded and their teacher nodded her assurance as she left. Harry and Hermione rushed into the hospital wing just in time to see their other selves leave. Hermione closed the door behind her then led Harry over to the bed to sit down just as Madam Pomfrey came out.

"Am I allowed to take care of my patients now?" Madam Pomfrey asked huffily as she moved over to Hermione and Harry and gave them their potions. Hermione pulled the box out of her pocket and handed it to the nurse.

"Could you hold onto to this until the Ministry comes?" Hermione asked. "I don't trust them to believe me." The nurse looked puzzled but took the box just as the doors burst open startling everyone inside.

"What's the matter?" Ron mumbled as he looked around groggily while Mia was holding her wand, pointing it at the door.

"What is this all about Potter?" Snape demanded as everyone looked toward the door. "Why did you request our audience?"

"Really, Professor Snape, must I remind you that this is a hospital wing and the people in here are my patients?" Madam Pomfrey demanded as she moved over to the potion teacher and poked him in the chest, emphasising each of her words. "And that means you are to come in here quietly and with some respect!" With that she stalked off towards Mia to make sure that she was continuing her recovery. She checked Ron over quickly before walking back over to Harry and Hermione as Fudge and McGonagall walked in.

"We have proof that Sirius is innocent," Hermione spoke up, causing Snape to throw his hands into the air.

"Oh this is getting ridiculous. I don't know what spell that man has cast over you, but this is a serious matter that *irresponsible* people need not concern themselves with," Snape sneered at the young witch, causing Harry to shoot to his feet.

"Watch your mouth," Harry snapped. "I'm sick and tired of you bad-mouthing Hermione! You hate me, I get it... but you will treat Hermione with respect."

"Or what?" Snape baited.

"Professor Snape!" McGonagall snapped, causing Snape to look at her in shock. "I have told you before to stop rising to their bait and start acting like an adult for once!" Fudge just looked at the woman before turning to Hermione.

"What proof do you have?" Fudge asked.

"Madam Pomfrey, the box please?" Hermione asked and the nurse walked over and handed her the box. Hermione opened it and pulled out the rat before placing it on the floor. "Could one of you cast the spell to check for an Animagus, please?"

McGonagall pulled out her wand and cast the spell. The blue light hit its target and just as before caused the rat to grow until finally Peter Pettigrew was revealed – the same man who ‘supposedly’ had died twelve years ago.

“Told you he was innocent,” Harry shot at Snape, who was staring at Peter with a shocked look.

“Oh Merlin,” Fudge exclaimed.

“Are we supposed to believe that that’s Peter? I mean, how do we know that it’s not someone with Polyjuice potion?” Snape asked scathingly as Dumbledore walked in and was shocked to see Peter lying on the floor.

“Well, the potion works for an hour – let’s sit around for an hour or so and see if it’s true,” Harry informed him as he and Hermione sat down.

“I’m afraid that it looks like Mr. Potter, Miss Granger, Miss Black and Mr. Weasley were right all along. Sirius Black is innocent,” Dumbledore spoke up, defending the teenagers from Snape. Dumbledore turned to Fudge. “It looks like we need to sort out everything – shall we leave so the children can rest from their ordeal?”

“Yes, do!” Madam Pomfrey demanded as she made shooing motions with her hands, trying to clear everyone out of the hospital wing. “And you can take that rat with you!”

Snape and Fudge moved over to Peter and picked him up before they dragged him out in the hallway. Madam Pomfrey followed them to the door and closed it before facing her patients once more. “I’ll say,” she huffed out before she came back to the bed and started to examine them again to make sure she hadn’t missed out on any injuries.

“I’m heading back to sleep,” Ron mumbled and closed his eyes and immediately fell fast asleep on his pillow. Mia just shook her head.

“And I thought the Hospital wing was suppose to be a calm place,” she muttered before she too turned on her side and fell back to sleep.

Harry and Hermione faced each other from where they were lying on their beds and shared a smile.

Now things could go back to normal.

TBC

Chapter 13: End of Term.

The next morning everyone made their way down into the hallway outside of the Great Hall where they saw Sirius, Professor Dumbledore, Professor McGonagall, Professor Lupin and Cornelius Fudge.

“What’s going on?” Hermione asked curiously as they moved closer.

“The Minister has something to tell you,” Professor McGonagall told them with a reassuring smile. Fudge turned to face Sirius and gave him a big yet insincere smile.

“I’m pleased to tell you, Sirius Orion Black, that each charge against you has been dropped,” Fudge told him officiously. Mia squealed as she hugged her dad, who just stood there shocked at what was happening.

Hermione let out a happy laugh before she threw herself into Harry’s arms and joined him in jumping up and down with joy. McGonagall smiled down at her students before moving over to Sirius and enveloping him in a hug.

“I hope to see you here more often now Mr. Black,” McGonagall told Sirius before she pulled away. “You did a good job raising Harry and Mia.”

“Thank you,” Sirius told her and McGonagall smiled as she stepped back. She then headed towards the Great Hall to prepare for the end of year feast and Dumbledore escorted Fudge towards the apparition point outside Hogwarts’ grounds.

“There you go!” Lupin clapped Sirius on the back. “You can now walk back into Hogwarts as a free man.” Sirius’ eyes lit up before he rushed out of the school onto the grounds and then casually strolled back in while Lupin rolled his eyes. “Bloody hell, he’s driving me nuts and we’ve just met back up.”

“Yep, it’s nice to walk back into the school as a free man,” Sirius told them, causing the kids to start laughing.

Mia turned to see the twins making their way down the stairs and an idea came to her suddenly.

“Oh!” Mia exclaimed as she hurried over to the twins, grabbed their hands and dragged them over towards her dad. “Dad, meet Fred and George Weasley – the same people who stole the map back from Filch and created havoc all over the school. Twins, meet my Dad – Sirius Black - also known as Padfoot of the Marauders.”

“All right!” Fred cheered as he moved closer to Sirius.

“And Professor Lupin here is also known as Moony,” Harry jumped in, causing George to look at their professor in astonishment before they cheered and yanked the two men over to the Great Hall so that they could pump them for information.

Hermione turned to Harry and smiled when she saw how happy he looked. She slipped her hand onto his arm.

“You look happy,” she told him when he looked down.

“Yeah, I’m happy that Uncle Sirius is now free and no one will think I’m a dark lord in the making,” He half-joked with her. She laughed as she leaned her head onto his shoulder. They both happily watched the others interact in silence for a moment.

“Come on, we gotta get to the Great Hall for breakfast and for anything Dumbledore is going to tell us,” Hermione told him as she tugged on his arm.

Most everyone was already settled in the Great Hall as they made their way in and sat at their usual spot. Once a few last stragglers entered the Hall, Dumbledore stood and gazed down at his students, glad to see that they all had survived another year.

“We have come to an end of another year. And what an eventful year we had,” there were chuckles from the students. “For those who do not yet know, I wish to let you all know that Sirius Black has been cleared of all charges brought against him all those years ago.” As everyone raised their goblets and cheered for Sirius, Mia just rolled her eyes when Sirius stood up from where he was sitting at the

teacher's table and waved before sitting down. "The house cup this year has, not to my surprise, been once again won by Gryffindor - for the third year in a row!"

Everyone in Gryffindor cheered at that. McGonagall smiled to herself as she clapped for her house while Snape sulked at losing yet again. Sirius was cheering louder than most, forcing Lupin to shake his head at his antics. Once everyone settled down, Dumbledore let out a small chuckle and continued.

"Yes, I'm sure we are all pleased. I just have one thing left to say you all. I hope you have a very good summer – take the time to relax and enjoy your time, because I'm sure it will fly past much faster than you realise," Dumbledore told them before he sat down, signifying the end of the announcements. Everyone turned back to their food, enjoying their breakfast.

Harry found himself relaxing in the Gryffindor common room with Mia after they had finally finished eating. Both of them were chatting about what they were going to do over the summer when a voice interrupted them.

"Oi, Harry, did you hear?" Dean demanded as he walked over to Harry, anger lining his face. Harry looked up at him curiously and a little concerned.

"Hear what?" Harry asked as he stood up with Mia.

"Professor Lupin is leaving – apparently Dumbledore got a lot of mail about having a werewolf working here," Dean informed Harry furiously. All the listening Gryffindors weren't happy with the news – Lupin was the best teacher they had and they didn't want to lose him.

"What!?" Mia demanded. "They can't do that!"

"Dumbledore was going to ignore them but Lupin said that he should leave," Seamus told them and Harry sighed.

"Great, he thinks he's a danger," Harry muttered.

"We need to see him," Mia told him and Harry nodded.

"Where are Ron and Hermione?" Harry asked, looking around for the two of them. Mia rolled her eyes.

"Ron is hanging out with the twins – they're still on high after meeting up with dad. Hermione is with McGonagall - something about a promise she had to keep," Mia explained and Harry nodded.

"That's good! I'll explain it later," he promised her as he took her wrist and hurried out of the common room, intent on catching up with Lupin.

They rushed into the Defence against the Dark Arts classroom and made their way over to the teacher's quarters. To their relief, Lupin was still inside packing. He looked up in surprise when he heard Mia and Harry make their way into his office.

"Good morning kids! Why are you here? We don't have any more classes," Lupin asked. Mia shot him a look of disbelief.

"What? You thought we would just get on with our lives knowing that you were leaving?" she demanded. "I can't believe that you didn't tell us!"

"It's for the best," Lupin told her. Mia just glared at him in return, leaving Harry to take up the questioning.

"So, why are you leaving?" Harry asked.

"Parents are not going to be too happy that there is a werewolf working here," Lupin reminded him but Harry shook his head.

"Who cares about them?" Harry demanded. "You're the best teacher any of us has ever had for this class and it's not fair that you should give up your future because of some closed-minded idiots!"

"Yes, but I'm also a dangerous one to be around – I forgot to take my potion and I could have attacked any of you. In fact, I tried to attack you both," Lupin reminded.

"But you didn't!" Mia exclaimed, causing Lupin to look at her, startled. "You didn't attack any of us. Sure, you had a slip but you didn't do

anything under the influence of the wolf so there is no reason to leave. You will be extra cautious from now on.”

“I can’t risk the chance,” Lupin told them. “Besides, the Minister has already revoked my rights to work at school 'since I am a danger to the children.’” Mia threw her hands up.

“They want me to bring them down – I can’t believe they are making it so easy! I like a challenge!” Mia complained to Harry before she crossed her arms and sulked, leaving Harry stifling a smile as he turned to face Lupin once more.

“I’ll explain once we’re away from the eyes and ears of the walls,” Harry told the confused man, who nodded before flicking his wand. His trunks packed themselves up and settled neatly on the floor next to the door.

“Are you sure there’s nothing we can do to change your mind?” Mia asked. Lupin smiled softly at the young female before shaking his head.

“No, I’m sure. Besides, it’s not like you’ll never see me again,” Lupin told her. “You *know* I will be coming up over the summer.” Mia and Harry shared a look before they turned to face Lupin once more.

“Why don’t you live at the house?” Mia asked. Lupin looked dumbstruck at her and she smiled. “Hey, you can’t deprive us of spending time with our Uncle Lupin can you?” she asked.

“Yeah, come on – you and Uncle Sirius can teach us how to do more pranks next year, and we would love to hear about our parents from another point of view,” Harry told him.

“And we can get you caught up on everything you missed out,” Mia agreed and Lupin smiled.

“I would like that very much,” Lupin told them. Both Mia and Harry were much happier and started to leave before Harry thought of something.

“Once question, did my mum turn Uncle Sirius different colours? I vaguely remember something about that but he won’t tell me,” Harry told him and Lupin let out a huge laugh.

“Oh boy, you have no idea of what your mother did to Sirius,” Lupin promised him as they walked out of the DADA class. “Just you wait until you hear what I have to tell you.”

Harry was sitting in the train compartment. They were all going home for the summer and none of them could wait because Sirius was finally free. They looked forward to being allowed to do what they wanted out in public. Harry, Hermione and Mia wished that everyone knew about Draco too so that he could be with them as well, but they knew his time would come.

Harry was sitting next to the window with Ron across from him. Mia was sitting next to Ron, next to the door, while Hermione was sitting next to Harry, across from Mia. Hermione was resting her chin on Harry’s shoulder as they both looked out of the window, with Crookshanks laying comfortably on Harry’s lap.

The cat had came back just after Sirius was declared free, much to Hermione’s relief. It turned out that he had been hiding out over at Hagrid’s hut. Hagrid had spent a lot of time feeding the cat, much to Hermione’s displeasure. Crookshanks was going to go on a strict diet this summer.

Mia was reading a book that she had received from Lupin before his departure from the castle. He told her that she would find it enlightening, and she was currently enjoying it. Ron was just relaxing with his eyes closed.

All four of them were relaxing in the aura of peace that had settled over them. They had never felt like this in first two years at Hogwarts and were soaking it up as much as they could. They had a feeling that it was a brief respite from something even larger on the horizon.

Mia looked up once something caught her eye. Puzzled, she turned her head and saw what had attracted her attention.

“Oh look!” Mia exclaimed when she saw something small and brown outside the window. Harry opened the window and snatched it out of the air. When he pulled his hand back in and closed the window, he revealed a small brown owl twitching in his grasp.

It had a note on his leg, so Harry untied it, opened it and read it out loud.

“I meant to give this to Ron at the school but it wasn’t ready until now. I then planned to give the owl to him at the station, but the little one was too excited about meeting his new master, so I decided to let him go and meet you there. Tell Ron that this is my way of saying sorry that he lost his pet,” Harry read out as the owl started flying around in a circle, hooting like mad. Finally he swooped down to rest himself on Ron’s thigh, hooting up at his new master.

“You’re kidding?” Ron exclaimed as he looked between Harry and the new owl.

“Nope, he wants you to have the owl,” Harry promised him and Ron gave him a huge grin as he offered his arm to the owl. The owl stepped up onto his arm and Ron immediately thrust his new pet under Crookshanks’ nose.

“Well, is it a normal owl?” Ron asked. Crookshanks just purred and Ron grinned. “That’s good enough for me!” Harry, Hermione and Mia laughed at that for the rest of the train ride home.

When the train came to a stop, Harry helped Crookshanks into his basket before latching it closed. He picked it up and stuck his arm out for Hedwig, who was resting on the shelf in the compartment. She swooped down and settled herself on his arm.

“Hey girl, time to head home,” Harry cooed and Hedwig gave him a small hoot in response. Harry made his way out of the compartment, following the others as he did.

They all made their way off the train and grabbed their trunks. Placing their burdens on the trolley, they made their way over to the wall and stopped.

“When we go through this wall, its back to reality,” Ron told them. All four of them shared a small smile of sadness – they had been avoiding the topic but they knew that once they stepped through that wall that it was back home to training, lectures and over protective mothers.

“We’ll make it,” Hermione told them as she reached out and took Harry’s hand. “We always do.” Harry couldn’t help but smile down at her before he looked at Ron.

“And, considering the fact that your dad has tickets for the Quidditch game this summer, we’ll see each other earlier than last time,” Harry told Ron, who grinned back.

“Not to mention that Dad has now been cleared, we should be in for the summer,” Mia told them, causing grins from the other three.

“Yeah,” Harry agreed, “and we’ll have Uncle Lupin there too.”

They all took a deep breath and stepped through the barrier to greet their guardians and face their summers.

As they made their way towards the families, they saw Arthur talking with Lupin and Sirius. Harry could see that Lupin looked better than he did all year at school and stifled a smile. He had a feeling that Uncle Sirius had dragged him out shopping so that he could look more respectable - and show him the ropes of the muggle world - because Lupin was wearing black jeans with a grey jumper without a cloak.

“Wow, dad must have really gone shopping for once,” Mia commented before shaking her head. “I wish I was there to see that!”

“And I wish I was there to see you chew out the Minister,” Sirius informed his daughter and Mia balked.

“How do you know about that?” Mia demanded before she spun around and glared at Harry, who put his hands up.

“Oh, like you didn’t expect me to go around telling everyone what you did!” Harry shot back, causing Mia to roll her eyes in annoyance before she turned around and embraced her father in a hug.

“You chewed out the Minister?” Molly demanded in a disapproving tone as she bore down on the younger female. She stopped and took a half-step back when Mia took a step towards her.

“Why don’t you keep that nose of yours out of my life and we won’t have any problems! I don’t need a bossy and overbearing replacement of a mother getting on my nerves,” Mia informed her – obviously still bitter with Molly for her antics that had originally caused her father to go on the run.

“How dare you!” Molly gasped out, utterly scandalized by Mia’s behaviour. “Someone should knock some manners into you, young lady.”

“And it won’t be you,” Mia shot back. “I do have manners - I just have the right not to use them when I don’t want to.”

Hermione covered her eyes as she let out a sigh while Harry and Ron snickered to themselves.

“Mia, I know you are angry with Mrs. Weasley...” she started only to get a shocked glare from Mia. She glared back at her. “But you can’t keep losing your temper with everyone that annoys you – you are already in major trouble from chewing out Snape and Pansy!”

“You chewed out Snape?” Sirius demanded and Lupin laughed.

“Wait until you hear the whole story!” Lupin promised Sirius before shaking his head. “McGonagall and Snape had the biggest row over her!”

“You see!” Molly demanded. “She is out of control... she needs to be brought back under control and taught what a young lady is supposed to act like!”

“A stuck up bitch who believes that purebloods are superior to half-bloods and muggleborns? One who thinks it’s perfectly alright for

muggleborn girls to be raped considering it's their own fault for being muggleborns?" Mia remarked, causing Molly to look at her in shock. "Sorry, but I'm not interested and I'm gonna make sure that every single pureblood on this planet realises that they are not superior to anyone."

"You'll be lucky if you can ever get a man with your attitude," Molly informed Mia primly and Harry grinned.

"Mia already has some male attention – I heard a couple of guys wondering how wild she could be when she wanted to," Harry informed Molly slyly causing her to gasp again.

"Besides, shouldn't you be worried about your own daughter? She doesn't seem to be attracting much attention herself," Mia informed her. Molly glared down at the young female.

"It won't be long until Ginny and the man that she is in love with will finally get together," Molly informed her. Hermione crossed her arms and arched an eyebrow at Ginny before looking at Molly.

"And let me guess who this mystery man is... could it be Harry?" Hermione asked sweetly. Harry shot Hermione a look of panic when she said that and Molly beamed.

"Of course! Those two would make a perfect couple, and you and Ron are perfect too!" Molly exclaimed. Ron and Hermione looked at each other in horror before they stepped apart, putting more distance between them.

"NO WAY!" Ron exclaimed, startling everyone. "Sorry - I love Hermione - but there is no way I'm getting together with her! She's a nightmare! She likes to study and she prefers staying in the library to having fun!" he shook his head in alarm. "Sorry, but there is no way I would be able to survive that relationship!"

"Oi!" Harry exclaimed, getting angry that Ron was insulting Hermione. Ron just pointed toward Harry.

“He’s the only one who can put up with her – they both compliment each other perfectly... and they will get together someday, trust me on that!” Ron promised.

“What?” Molly demanded before she laughed. “Ron, you will realise that Hermione is perfect for you while Harry and Ginny are perfect for each other. It may not look like it now but it will become clear in the future.”

“Right!” Mia exclaimed. “Get me out of here before she pairs me up with Snape or, Merlin forbid, Voldemort – I don’t want to stand around and listen to a stupid woman’s rambles.” With that, she pushed her trolley away from Molly and stalked off.

Harry just glared at Molly before he grabbed Hermione’s hand, linking his fingers with hers, and walked off as well.

“We’ll see you over the summer,” Sirius told Arthur and Ron, who nodded.

“Yeah and tell Harry I’ll owl him over the summer and that I’m sorry for mum,” Ron told him. Sirius smiled.

“Don’t worry. Once Mia hits the punching bags, she’ll be fine – Harry will be fine too once Hermione calms him down,” Sirius promised him. Ron nodded as Sirius and Lupin walked after the other three children.

Arthur turned to his wife, deeply ashamed of what she had just done.

“Molly, I will only say this once and you better listen. Harry is not and never will be your child. Leave him alone. He has the right to choose whom he wants to be with and right now, I think he made his choice very clear – he wants Hermione,” Arthur informed her before he and Ron made their way over to the car.

Molly’s eyes narrowed; she promised that everyone *would* understand that Harry and Ginny were meant to be together. And that she would place that young girl back in her place, where she belonged.

The End/ TBC

Here we are the end of third year and I hope you all enjoyed it because I enjoyed writing this story.

The first chapter of the next book will be out next Monday – Harry Potter and the Darkness, Year 4 and we'll get to see just how much trouble can the gang get into, what secrets are being revealed and certain scenes will pop up.

Thanks for all the reviews!

Sorry this was a little short – I didn't want to take the focus away from what I was trying to show.

Thanks to Janax for being my beta – you're a godsend!

Harry Potter and the Darkness Year 4 is now up with the first chapter - please head into my name and into my profile where you will receive the link for the story.

Thank you all so much for the reviews and i hope you enjoy the next one:)